DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
7643 Huron River Drive
Dexter, MI 48130
734-426-8480

BALANCE
"Lightening the Load"
Matthew 11:28-30
January 22, 2006
By Dr. Matt Hook

[Luggage is piled at the altar] This is the luggage from our trip that didn't "belong" to anyone in particular, but we still carried it all over Costa Rica and could not have done without it. One of the most stressful times in our trip was yesterday evening in Houston, getting our personal luggage, plus these 11 or so big pieces of equipment including a piano and speakers through customs. We were trying to identify it, drag it, and push it through the terminal without missing our flight from Houston to Detroit, or and without losing Jenny, Kim, Alex, Jillianne, or Sue! The reality was, we had a lot of stuff; but there must have been a better way to do what we were trying to do. You also might remember that we gave a chalice to our connecting congregation in Palmares. Unfortunately, we didn't see them till the end of the week and I had to carry that big chalice in my backpack the whole week, making sure not to break it! Today we're looking at how to lighten the load of our lives and make sure that what we are letting go are the right things in order to experience the meaning and balance we crave. And we're going to do it with one of my all time favorite passages.

Jesus summarizes the secret of lightening the load of your life in one sentence in Matthew 11:28-30. If we learn to live out these words from Christ, our stress will go down and our satisfaction will go up, and the overload will be lightened. If you can adopt this into your lifestyle, **this could be the turning point of your life today.** Here's what's scary about this particular message: If you respond to God's leading today, people around you will notice, and you'll have to explain yourself. You'll have to say why you are or aren't carrying all the luggage that they are…Do you have the courage to tell them it's God?

"Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (RSV)

Jesus says three things. **"come," "take", and "learn".** That's all you need to know about stress management.

1. <u>COME</u> TO JESUS
He says *"Come to Me all you that are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest."* It truly doesn't matter where you are coming from; there is a path to Jesus. No matter what you've done, you have a way to Jesus right now. In Costa Rica, I asked Roman, the rough guy who owned the mechanic shop where our sister church meets when he became a Christian. He said "Hace seis anos. Antes de Jesu Cristo, tuvo chicas, motorcycletas, playas, y un grupo." Gangs, drinking, women, beaches, and wild living. And here he is, turning his garage over to his church every Sunday and helping lead worship. And when he found out one mom wasn't coming back because the Sunday School was in the part that contained grease and 3 weeks in a row she had to throw her kid's clothes out, Roman got these tough guys that hang around his mechanic shop to make sure it was clean and beautiful for all the madres y ninos every weekend! Hear this: WHERE EVER you are, there is a path to Jesus, and all you have to do is turn to meet him. He's already here. Turn from what you've been pursuing, about-face to Him, and let his strong arms hold you. So the first point is turn to Jesus, each day.

Come to Christ, no matter how overloaded you are. In the Bible people came to Jesus for many different reasons; but here Jesus says "You could come to Me for rest." Release from stress, release from overload. He says, "Are you weary? Overloaded? Even if you've done it to yourself, come to Me."

If he says "come to me," it's because you and I aren't coming to him. We're coming to something else. Who or what do you naturally turn to when you are exhausted, when you are depleted, when you're overloaded? You may be a Christian but I doubt that your first choice is Jesus. Is it food? Or TV? Or the internet? Or a drink, or a pill? Do you turn to anger, or depression? You may turn to some other form of escape. But none of these things can give your soul the rest you crave. Nothing else can lighten the load. Only God can give you that.

Ancient Israel put it like this – *"God gives power to those who are tired and worn out and He offers strength to the weak. Those who wait on the Lord will find new strength." (Isaiah 40:29, 31 - NLT)* It says new strength. It's not just strength you had and you didn't know about. It's strength from God, supernatural strength, strength from outside yourself. Sometimes it comes as people, sometimes from within. How do you get it? Isaiah says, *"Wait on the Lord."* Come to the person—Jesus. Don't think that anything else can satisfy like he can. His Words are medicine.

Jesus said, it's not a matter of do. It's a matter of come. *"Come to Me." "Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength."* How do you do that? Get alone by yourself so you're not pretending or worried what others are thinking. Don't role-play. Turn off the TV and the cell phone. Be totally honest with yourself, warts and all, and the focus will shift from you…to God, and you'll begin to sense His grace. God isn't going to scold you when you come to Him for rest. He's going to love you. We forget this. If you'll just come to God like a little child comes to a father, He will teach you how to truly rest, and he'll bring the joy back into your life. But you've *got* to turn to *Him*. That's the first step—come to Jesus.

2. GIVE UP CONTROL

Jesus says, *"Come to Me if you're tired and you're weary and you have heavy burdens and I'll give you rest,"* and then He says, *"Take My yoke upon you."* The reason why we get so overloaded is because we think we have to be in control of everything, and we attach ourselves to all kinds of unnecessary stuff we think we need and lug this baggage around our whole life. This is Jesus' second solution to your overload. He says, *"Take My yoke upon you."* Now I know that sounds more like another burden being put on your shoulders, (aren't yokes those big wooden things?) but you need to realize 2 things: First, **a yoke is NOT a harness.** A harness is for one animal. A yoke is for 2. It's a way to lighten the load. Why not share your load with Jesus? Second, the truth is **you're going to be yoked to something in life.** Years ago Bob Dylan wrote a song, "You gotta serve somebody." You're going to give your life for someone or something. You may be yoked to your career. You may be yoked to the desire to acquire great wealth, or your country club. You may be yoked by the expectations of other people. All of those are heavy burdens. They're heavy yokes to carry on your shoulders. You probably have close to a dozen yokes. Job yokes, family, community, and church yokes are yours. You're a big yoke! Jesus said, "Throw all of those things off and put on Mine." But how? To understand this, we need to remember that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. Remember this is 1st Century terminology here!

In Jesus' day, rabbis differed in how they interpreted the Torah. A rabbi's set of interpretations was called that rabbi's yoke. So when you went to be a disciple of a rabbi, you took that rabbi's yoke upon you. Being a disciple didn't just mean thinking like that rabbi thought. It meant doing what that rabbi did. So you could learn to know—in order to do…in order to be like that rabbi. [Like the hilarious, retired Costa Rican missionary Mary Miller and I talked about, we're not inviting people to yet another set of rules. Christianity's not rules, it's a lifestyle of response to Jesus.] Now, in order for you to be a disciple, the rabbi would grill you "Can this person spread my yoke? Does this kid have what it takes? Does this kid love God?" If not, the rabbi might say "Go and continue learning your family trade." But if the rabbi thought this kid has what it takes, this kid would follow. This is what it means to be a disciple.

So when Jesus comes to town, with his pack of disciples trying to keep up with him, and Jesus says to you

"Follow me," it means Jesus himself thinks you have what it takes. You have what it takes! Do you see the huge implications this has? It's not just that you believe in Jesus—it's that Jesus believes in YOU! And he invites you to come to him for rest, and take his yoke upon you!

Here's the trouble: **You can be detached from this yoke.** If you are overloaded this morning it's because you're not yoked to Christ this very moment. You can be a Christian but you can take that yoke off. So you and I have got to put it on moment-by-moment and say, *"Jesus share this with me."* When I preach, the reason I pray is to say "Jesus, share this with me." After all, I know I don't have much worth saying, but Jesus in me does. When you visit someone who's sick, pray "Jesus share this with me." When your family needs extra help, pray "Jesus, share this with me." When you go in for that meeting with your boss, pray "Jesus, share this with me." It's that simple. Jesus says, "Come to Me - Give up control." Those are the first two things. The yoke is a symbol of partnership. God says, "I will help you out."

When I'm yoked with Christ we move together in the same direction and at the same pace. Who better to be your guide through your life? When you are yoked to Jesus Christ you can't go in a different direction than Jesus. And when you are yoked with Jesus Christ you can't go any faster than Jesus goes. He sets the direction and He sets the pace. He says, "Come to Me… give up control. Take my yoke," and then He says,

3. LEARN FROM JESUS

That's the third key to lightening your load. "**Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:29)** Watch how He lived and then do it. If you want balance, if you want health, if you want sanity in your schedule follow the model of Jesus. Learn.

Our lives can become one deadline right after another. And in the midst of it all, Jesus tells us. *"Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble in heart."* **Gentle and humble**. Gentle and humble.

This is his answer to our constant need to get ahead (or at least catch up!) This is his answer to the fact that we are blind to our own sinfulness. Jesus was gentle and humble. He was totally dependent upon God. What was Jesus' secret of peace? In the gospel of John there are 12 times where Jesus says, "I only do what the Father tells me to do. … I only say what the Father tells me to say… I think what He wants me to think… I go where He wants me to go… I stay where He wants me to stay… I do what He wants me to do…" **He trusted God wasn't holding out on him.** He didn't go seeking elsewhere. He trusted God. He didn't try to do too much. He didn't try to "get ahead." He said, "All I do is what the Father tells me and I don't worry about anything else."

Do you think that would change the stress level in your life if you began to live that way? I know you came in here this morning with a lot of stuff on your shoulders that you could've brought to the altar like this luggage. We all bring it in here every Sunday. But as your pastor, I want you leave it here today. Will you? I want you to lighten your load. I want you to find Balance by: **Coming to Jesus... Giving up Control... Learning from Jesus...** Remember, you can't do it all. –Consider every opportunity an invitation, that you have complete say over. And consider this: the greatest invitation you'll ever get in your life. *Jesus is saying:*

> ***"Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."*** **Matthew 11:28-30 (RSV)**

Some of you right now are at the breaking point from overload. Come to Jesus. Give up control. Learn to trust, and you will find rest for your soul.

Prayer: What's weighing you down? What extra baggage are you carrying? Luggage of **worry, tension, stress, guilt, fear, bitterness, anxiety.** Problems with your children? With your finances? Aging parents? Difficulty with your business or your health? God brought you here today so He could say this to you *"Come to Me!"* Have you ever come to Jesus? Pray this prayer in your mind: "Dear God, I am tired of being tired all the time. I'm tired of trying to control everything. I'm tired of a life without rest and peace. Please forgive me for all the times I've turned to other things for release instead of turning to You. Today I

come back to You. I want You to set the direction and the pace. Forgive me for filling my life with less important things so that I have no time for what matters most. I want to learn from Your model, Jesus. I want to be gentle and humble like You so I can have the peace that You offer. In my overload, in my darkest hour, I ask You to fill me with Your power, let the light of Your love shine on me. In Your name, I pray. Amen."

* Some of the thoughts for this sermon come from Dr. Benji Kelly's sermon series on Balance.