

**Come to Me All Ye who are Weary and Heavy Laden** (Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30)  
Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020



**This bench, pictured here, outside of Grace Church in Sutton,** was the idea of Doreen Page a few years ago. Doreen thought it would be a good idea to place a bench outside of the church where parishioners might sit a while, perhaps as they waited for their driver to pick them up. She also imagined people walking by the church during the week, who might like a spot to sit and rest for a while, before continuing on their journey. A bench by a church, an invitation to rest.

**Every year now,** the bench that Doreen bought, is secured in place by Vince Royea, and it sits and waits for someone to sit upon it. I don't really know how many people actually use it throughout the week. I don't keep my eye on it.

**A bench just sits and waits for you.** It's got all the time in the world. Its destiny is to provide support to those who want rest, who wish to sit and watch and wait. To recuperate, to ponder, to enjoy their surroundings.

**I've been using the bike path** up in Granby lately, and they have a lot of benches and picnic benches scattered around the perimeter of Lac Boivin. They are well used in the summer, especially after a long bike ride, a walk, or roller blade, people are glad to rest their bodies and watch the other bodies go by. It's a great place to people watch. And most of the people you're watching there are in a good mood, doing outdoor activities that they love. It lifts the spirit to see people having a good time.

**And I remember what Barbara Brown Taylor** wrote in her book, *An Altar in the World*, that as we watch people in the subway, the bus, or from a park bench in Granby, it's a good practice to imagine what life is like for this person.... We can use our imaginations as we wonder about the challenges they are facing in their lives, their families, their joys and sorrows, the conflicts they find themselves in.

**This July, I am reminiscing** about the many benches on the seacoast of New Hampshire that I'm familiar with. Some years ago, small dedication plaques began to appear on the benches along the seacoast. Most of them are dedicated to a mother or father who had enjoyed long walks along the rocky coastline or along the sandy beaches that line the coast. When you sit on a bench that has been dedicated to a loved one, I find it often makes me think about the shortness and impermanence of my own life. It invites introspection. And then that often leads me into thinking about how I will spend the remaining (unknown) number of years I have left. And why do I sweat the small stuff, instead of just enjoying the good stuff of life??

#### **Dedications bench on Vancouver coastline:**

- Allan Yin Lam 1978-2007  
"Friends are the bacon bits in the salad bowl of life."
- Chester England. "This bench is dedicated to the men who lost the will to live whilst following their partners around the shoe shops of Chester."
- Irene Lai Poh Sim 1932-2009 "Her kindness, the language the deaf can hear and the blind can see. Always in our memory."
- In loving memory of our beloved daughter and sister Brenna Innes, 1986-2007. "All that I wanted has been right in front of me."

**The dedicated bench** offers a physical reminder of the person's time and their place in this beloved area. If I have a choice when I'm dead, I think I would prefer to have a bench dedicated in my name, rather than a bookmark, which seems to be the current trend. How delightful it would be to think that people or birds might alight on my bench and find a resting place, and maybe, read my name, as well as a pithy saying, and wonder what kind of fellow was this.

**A bench can be many things.** It can be a memorial. It can be a place where we watch other people from. It can be a place of waiting, an opportunity to slow down and notice the world around us, a place of encounter with a strange person we've never met before.

**A bench can also be ignored.** You don't have to sit on it. You are not compelled. You can just keep on going, ignoring its invitation to sit and rest and be still.

**Around my house,** we have many chairs and we have sometimes had benches. I have a tendency to ignore their invitation to come and rest. If I sit down, I don't often relax, I just end up seeing what work needs to be done, so I get up and do it. That's why it's good to get off your own property and find a chair or a bench somewhere else, so that if you do dare to sit down and rest, you won't be looking at the potential work you think you should be doing.

**When Doreen bought the bench,** she also thought it would be good to have some sort of plaque to go along with it. Not a dedication, but a passage from the bible which would be meaningful. Together, I believe we settled on, *"Come to me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* These were the comfortable words that we settled upon.

**This was one of the things on our to do list,** which has yet to be done – but which can still be done. I think of it each time I walk in and out of the church. The intended sign, as well as what the bench keeps whispering to me as I pass it by: *"Come to me all ye who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest."*

**I confess,** that I am not very good at resting when I am weary. I just keep going until I get sick or break down. Resting often seems frivolous, or not as important as working or worrying, or doing things. To be seen resting, lays you open to the accusation of being lazy or unproductive. Even if other people are not demanding that you always be "on", you yourself are often your own worst boss, requiring of

yourself, constant activity and an unusual sense of responsibility, as if the world would collapse if you were not in charge.

**What do I resist the invitation,** for certainly I am weary at times?

**Like you, weary of confinement,** weary of uncertainty about the future, weary of the news, weary of injustice. And many times just physically weary.

**I think the bench is real.** Sit down and relax it tells me. Take a load off your feet and your soul. The bench is also a metaphor; an invitation from Jesus.

**“Come to me all ye** who are weary and heavy-laden 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.”

**The bench invites us to sit, to be still.** To admit our weariness not only to ourselves but also to Jesus who sits on the bench with us. I wonder if you can picture yourself on this bench, not alone this time, but with Jesus at your side. Jesus beside you, listening to you pour out your soul, your weariness, your disappointments, your discouragements. And in the pouring out of our souls, maybe we can find some rest and an easing of the burdens we have been carrying for too long on our own. God knows we shoulder too much for too long, more weight than is good for us. Today, we are invited to unburden ourselves in the presence of the living Lord.

**And Jesus is gentle and humble in heart.** He will not condemn us for revealing our weakness. He will not lay upon us further burdens of guilt or shame. He will instead love us completely. And in loving us completely, we will find ourselves strangely lighter and freer. To be yoked with Jesus, is to be in a relationship that seeks our wellbeing and our freedom. As we grow in Christian maturity, we learn to un-yoke ourselves from the burdens others have placed upon us and the unrealistic burdens we have laid upon ourselves, and find a freedom in Christ to be our truer selves.

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**Now let's stretch the bench** metaphor a little further. While you and I can find rest for our bodies and souls on the bench with Jesus; you and I can be a bench for others.

**So often, we find ourselves** in the presence of people who just need to unload their burdens. They don't necessarily expect answers, but they are looking for someone who will really hear them, and understand their weariness, their sadness and their need to be loved. We can be benches for one another. We can become places of rest for the weary. We can become a place where people can unload and leave a little more refreshed by having been in our presence, as we are Christ to them.

**The church is meant to be such a place.** Pews, which are a lot like benches, (rather than individual chairs) are invitation to come and rest in the presence of the Lord. But also to rest in the presence of others. We are not alone. We are in this together. And there are times when I need you to be there for me. You will be my bench and my resting place. And there are times when I am called to be there for you, with an open heart and a gentle response.

**If we find Jesus to be a resting place for us,** we are also invited to be a resting place for others who will come to us in their weariness and looking for rest.

**This summer,** during this time of pause and curtailment of activities, listen to the call of the bench, inviting you to come and sit for a while, to unburden yourself in the presence of Jesus.

**This summer,** notice how you are being invited to be a resting place for others and rejoice that Christ works through you to give rest to the weary and hope to the faint of heart.

Amen.