



BY REV. E. JAMES RIVETT

[Jesus says,] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

Meditation: These verses are a great comfort to many. Jesus' invitation to rest paints a beautiful picture for those who are overwhelmed, burdened, or exhausted by the yoke that they bear (yoke: a heavy harness that rests over the necks of two animals working the fields). Yet, these verses go even deeper than the physical rest that, perhaps, many of us picture with these words. Jesus is talking about the rest of our conscience when our sins have been forgiven. With that burden lifted, a Christian indeed finds rest for the soul. Martin Luther describes these verses in this way, "Here there are two parts. The 'labor' and the burden signify the contrition, anxiety, and terrors of sin and death. To 'come to' Christ is to believe that sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. When we believe, our hearts are brought to life by the Holy Spirit through Christ's Word. Here, therefore, are these two chief parts: contrition and faith" (Concordia, 189).

The yoke that we carry around with us is indeed heavy. We struggle under the weight of sin, of trying to make up for the mistakes of our past. The Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day had a "yoke" of strict obedience to God, which Jesus called heavy (Matthew 23:4). Many thought that a life of obedience to the Law of God would bring eternal

salvation. Many today think the same, and try to live a perfect life, or at least one that's good enough to win God's favor and earn a place in heaven.

This is impossible for us to do, and such a burden only makes us weary and worn out. Jesus trades our heavy, burdensome, sinful yoke for His light and perfect yoke of the Gospel, the forgiveness of our sins. He took our sins and our burdens with Him to the cross. His forgiveness takes away our burden, our weariness, our despair, and provides us with the rest that only Christ can give in the comfort of the Gospel.

Reflection: Think about a time when you have physically carried something very heavy. What did it feel like when you were carrying it? How did it feel to finally be able to set it down or have someone either take it from you or carry it with you? Try to picture sin and the burden of the Law in a physical way, and then the relief of forgiveness when Jesus takes away those burdens.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, the burden that I carry is heavy, and I am tired. Forgive my sins and yoke me to You in Your Gospel, that I may also find rest. Amen. Q

Taken from *Lent and Easter Devotions: Journeys with Jesus* by the late Rev. E. James Rivett (written with an LWML grant and published by LCMS 2012. Used with permission of LCMS). After becoming a parish pastor, Rev. Rivett felt the Lord leading him to full-time prison ministry. For 20 years, he ministered to inmates in Arizona, Tennessee, and Illinois. After returning to parish ministry, he still included prison ministry as part of his mission.