

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Barbara Hutchinson  
St. Francis Feast Day, Year C  
October 2, 2016

Formatted: Centered

I met two women one hot, humid evening at the Lancaster General Hospital, shortly after I was aroused from sleep with my chaplain pager incessantly beeping, then abruptly silenced, as I ran down the hall to the trauma room. The women were mother and daughter. Both looked distraught. Both were visibly anxious, one through her darting eyes and the other through her rapid pacing in the tightly confined space of the trauma room filled with these foreign machines and instruments. As their story unfolded around me over the next few days, I learned that this mother and daughter had had a fractured relationship for many years. The accusations and threats on both sides, the frequent exchange of hurtful words, the rage and anger which resided in their hearts had shattered their souls. They were weary to the bone. Just at the moment when they had dedicated themselves to begin a path toward reconciliation, the mother had a stroke and was kept alive only through life support. I sat with the daughter for hours while she wailed against God, while she lamented her past, while she grieved the loss of the possible reconciliation she had actually yearned for over the decades. She often was reduced to a puddle of tears, while I held her, trying to console her with my presence, for her pain was too deep for mere words to touch, such healing was possible for God alone.

Commented [BH1]: I'd say over the decades because what you're implying is over the decades that preceded the narration

We arrived at the point of removing the life support and I was asked to come and pray with them through these painful moments of release and parting. The daughter was nervously clasping her mother's hand and pleading with her eyes that I bring the peace of God into the situation, so her mother could at least have that last gift, a moment of peace in a life which had been so tumultuous. I began the litany of prayers, only to be interrupted by the daughter's soft, nearly inaudible whisper, imploring me to give her a moment alone with her mother.

Commented [BH2]: With them?

The doctor and I exited the room. When we returned, the daughter again was in a puddle of tears, but something had shifted. There was a peace within her. There was a burgeoning comfort that she was offering to her mother. There was a strength I had never before seen in her which had emerged in those moments alone with her mother. I picked up the litany of prayers where I had left off, the life support was removed, the mother desperately gasped for her last breath, and her life ended.

In those moments alone with her mother, the daughter, I believe, heard the words of Jesus, "Come to me, you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." She came to Jesus and shared her heavy burdens with him and she surrendered her shattered soul, her broken heart, her anger, her resentments, her desire for reconciliation, her emotional exhaustion, and her deep love of her mother. With her words "I forgive you" she took on Jesus' yoke of gentleness and meekness, she listened to the voice of Jesus calling her to come, to be like him, to turn to the goodness within, and to release all else, and she found rest. The rest Jesus offered

her and offers us is not physical rest, but rest of the soul, Sabbath rest, the rest which resides in peace. It is the same rest I prayed for with these words for at her mother's service, as her body was lowered into the ground: "Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord."

We have a glimpse of this eternal rest each time we come to Jesus, when we surrender our souls weary from carrying the burdens of a world where injustice reigns and broken relationships flourish, when we take the yoke of Jesus upon our own shoulders, and we move in sync with the grace of Christ.

The daughter could have chosen differently. She could have surrendered to the evil, the urge within her to keep the resentments fresh and alive in her heart, the desire for retribution, the compulsion to be right, rather than to be in right relationship. She could have claspd tightly to the wrongs her mother had done to her numerous times and she would have left that hospital room with a soul ever wearier and more heavily burdened.

Jesus says, "Come to me". This requires choice and action on our part. We can move toward or away from love and reconciliation, toward or away from the goodness of God, toward or away from a new life in Christ.

Each move requires surrender, the release of our weariness and heavy burdens, either into something that gives life or into something that takes a life of meaning away from ourselves or someone else. We each need to ponder at every moment the choice to make, however we can rest in the knowledge that the invitation from Jesus is always there "Come to me, you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

I often begin my weekly e-newsletter with a similar invitation: "So come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been here for a long time, you who have tried to follow, and you who have failed. Come, it is the Lord who invites you."

These sentences are actually an offertory invitation, used to bid us to come to the altar, carrying the heavy burdens of times when we have failed, when others have failed us, when faith in God was fleeting, when faith in others was non-existent, when we were not worthy of other people's faithfulness. We bring this forward, with each step that we take, naming and owning our weariness and afflictions until we are bowed down and bend our knees. It is through our reach for the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, that we yoke ourselves to Jesus. We give all this to Jesus to hold with us and we leave the rail rested, restored in faith, renewed in life, finding our own resurrection through Jesus'.

Surrendering all to Jesus, to the goodness, is hard, as the daughter learned. It can be done with a sense of relief, heartbreak, gratitude, exasperation, desperation,

determination, sorrow, anger, tears, or joy. Yet, always, incredible energy is released, when we take on the yoke of love.

Today we are celebrating the Feast Day of St. Francis, a saint who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and who was known for his life of meaning and service. He understood how to bend his knee to Jesus by walking a humble life of peace, poverty, reverence for nature, and love of animals. One of his famous quotes is “My God and my all” which speaks of his openness, his willingness to be yoked to that which gives him life, the goodness of God. Perhaps, if we take on the spiritual practice of repeating this throughout the day, we too will knowingly and willingly surrender our all to the one who calls us forward and gives us life, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.