

Fear Does Not Have the Final Say

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“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

This invitation from Jesus comes at an especially poignant moment for us.

We live in an exceptionally wearying time.

We are wearied by the increasing rate and scope of the changes sweeping across our world.

We are wearied by the ever-mounting demands on our constantly dwindling supply of time, resources, and energy.

We are wearied by the pressure to measure up to society’s standards, standards so far out of reach they might as well be on Yavin 4.

We are wearied by a seemingly never-ending stream of manufactured outrage and scandal.

We are wearied by the constant need to fact-check *everything* that comes from people in positions of authority.

Most of all, we are wearied by the heavy burden of fear.

Fear has a *powerful* grip on us right now.

Fear of terrorists.

Fear of people we don't understand and don't *want* to understand.

Fear of a broken political system.

Fear of *possible* policy changes.

Fear of shifting demographics.

Fear of a changing climate.

Fear of saying the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time.

Fear of not knowing how to respond, or if the response will even matter.

Fear of losing privileged status.

Fear of being kicked out of the only home someone's ever known.

Fear of violence and war.

None of us are immune to fear. It has saturated our national dialog, crept into our coffee shop conversations, wormed its way into our discussions around the kitchen table.

Fear's power is that it isolates us, makes us feel like we're islands in the midst of a raging sea.

Fear cuts us off from *actually* confronting and dealing with the issues in our lives, causing us instead to look inward and downward.

In place of *living*, fear causes us to focus only on how we can avoid more pain and suffering.

Fear is the heaviest burden, and, whether we acknowledge it or not, we are weary from shouldering it.

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Jesus calls us to find rest in him, to exchange our weariness and heavy burdens for his yoke.

Which makes me wonder: does anyone even *know* what a ‘yoke’ is anymore?

No, not an *egg* yolk.

Or a “Knock-knock” ‘yoke.’

Knock-knock...

Who’s there?

Doris.

Doris who?

Doris locked that’s why I’m knocking.

The kind of yoke we’re talking about is the one worn by animals so that they can pull something, like a cart, or a plow, or even a barge.

Which on the surface doesn't really sound any better than those heavy burdens we've been bearing, does it? I mean, it *looks* like we've just given up *one* heavy thing for another.

But what do you notice about the yoke?

The ox isn't alone.

The yoke joins *two* oxen together.

And that's not all! The *two* of them are also joined to the farmer, who's manning the plow.

A yoke is a relationship.

That's what Jesus gives us, a relationship.

Jesus' yoke, the yoke that takes away our weariness, that removes our heavy burdens...that yoke is love.

In place of fear, Jesus gives us love.

Love is the opposite of fear.

Love doesn't isolate, it doesn't build walls; it brings people together, it unites us in striving for something hopeful.

Love doesn't cause us to curve in on ourselves; it compels us to reach out.

Love isn't about merely *avoiding pain*; it launches us into living!

Brothers and sisters, we are yoked together with Christ through his love for us.

We are yoked together by the waters of baptism, where Jesus promises us that we are united with him in his death and resurrection, dead to sin and raised to new life as God's daughters and sons.

We are yoked together by the bread and wine, united around the table as Jesus gives us his own body and blood, promising us that there is *nothing* he wouldn't do to free us from this burden of fear, even going so far as to die for us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, through God's love we *are* yoked together.

We may disagree with each other, and in our disagreements fear will try to drive a wedge between us, try to cause us to turn away from those in need, try to coerce us to abandon the way of Christ, who gave his life for *all* people, regardless of nationality, creed, color of skin, socio-economic status, or anything else we humans use to separate ourselves from each other.

But fear does not have the final say; we *are* yoked together by Christ's love.

So in these moments, when fear rages around us, Jesus speaks again these words of promise: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."