

The weary and heavy laden (Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30)

Rest is often viewed as a privilege rather than a necessity.

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Rest is a radical and countercultural concept these days. It seems wrong, almost indulgent and selfish to rest. We glorify busy-ness, admiring those who seem to juggle so much at once. The standard answer among my peers when we ask, “How are you?” is not “fine” but “busy.” Busy-ness implies value and worth, a contribution to society and to life. Also, it is usually the truth. We are busy.

And yet, Jesus invites us to rest. Rest is vital to our productivity, to our well-being—and to our faith. In the Bible, God rests on the seventh day, and Jesus regularly retreats by himself to pray and rest.

Yet in our society, rest is often viewed as a privilege rather than a necessity. We look for jobs that offer vacation days and sick days, personal days and—thanks to the labor movement—weekends and holidays. And even then, many of us have to “accrue” our vacation and sick days. These are considered better jobs because of this ability to rest.

But even when we are paid to rest it’s hard to do it. Even if we take vacation or time away from work or family demands, we have the ability to be constantly connected through texts, emails, and news alerts. What’s more, at the tip of our fingertips are mobile devices that stimulate and engage our minds through games, entertainment, and social media. It can take work and real commitment to truly rest.

For others, rest from work is much more elusive. My parents were first-generation immigrants whose jobs in the United States never afforded them the luxury of paid leave or vacation. If they did not work they lost out on wages, and they needed that money to pay our bills and rent. Still today, way too much of our labor force—those we depend on to work in our fields, our restaurants, our construction sites, in child care—face similar barriers to rest.

Those of us who have the privilege to rest should do so. We should also uphold the value of rest for all who work. Perhaps justice comes when all who are weary and heavy laden can finally find rest.