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Sept. 21<sup>st</sup> 2025

Scripture: Matthew 11: 28-30

Sermon Title: Resting in Grace

Prayer...

Matthew 11:28-30

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

The Message

28-30 “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how

to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

Introduction:

I am learning that I am at my best when I live like a contemplative.

What do I mean by being a contemplative? For me a contemplative is a person who lives an unhurried life, seeking to be fully present to God, self, others, and all of creation. A contemplative is a prayerful person who listens first and remains calm even when facing adversity. A contemplative is a person of peace, strong, but also gentle. Kind and courageous. A contemplative is ultimately someone who rests in God's grace and lives compassionately out of a place of rest. A contemplative person makes time to read and to

enjoy the beauty of God's creation. Contemplatives often love the arts: music, theater, film, painting, and dance.

I hope you feel this church fosters a contemplative spirit in each of us. Thanks to Ciaran Hynes, our liturgist today, we have a beautiful Peace Garden that helps us foster a contemplative approach to life on our campus. We spread peace in our community by hosting this beautiful garden.

During one of the first sermons I ever gave here at this church I played with the language of the saying of our town Newberg. The saying for Newberg is that this town is a great place to grow. In one of my first sermons, at our church I suggested that Newberg First Presbyterian is a grace place to grow. Part of what makes our church a grace place to grow is our beautiful peace garden.

Our peace garden is more than a ministry of our church, it represents the essence of our church as a community of grace, hope, peace, and love.

Friends, I do not have to remind you that we live in a hurried world. Whether scrolling through social media or engaging traffic on our roads, we daily encounter an intense world of activity that opens us to competing ideas, advertisements, economic demands, and various challenges to stay engaged in purposeful living. One way to approach life is to thrust ourselves into it, almost like jumping into the deep end of a pool and trying our best to stay afloat.

I think a better approach is to rest in God and to engage life with a contemplative heart, resting in God's grace.

Jesus certainly lived in a busy world with many demands. He regularly had people come to him challenging his ideas, seeking his comfort and healing, and at times causing unrest. He ultimately experienced the violence of the cross because his world was so unhinged and vulnerable to evil.

We live in a similar world with much beauty but also significant violence. The last two weeks have shown an increase in actual

violence and the violence of rhetoric. We continue to see polarizing views and a lack of kindness and civility. We are called to follow the example of Jesus by learning to walk in love and peace even with one's enemies. When possible we are to strive to make our enemies our friends. Instead, many people camp out with people like them and throw insults at the other side. Recent political assassinations of both the republican activist Charlie Kirk and Democratic senator, Melissa Hortman and her husband, as well as recent school shootings in Colorado and Minnesota, plus ongoing violence in many other nations as well, remind us that we must choose to love one's neighbors even when opinions differ. We need to realize that spiritual communities of love and compassion must remain nonviolent. I personally think we need better gun control legislation and we need a society that honors free speech and kindness to all people. By all people, I mean kindness to people of different different genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, immigration status, and really any other form of identity. We can share different

opinions, but kindness, empathy, and compassion are values that must never be compromised no matter our personal opinions.

In our Scripture today, Jesus invites us into his rest, his gift of grace.

Grace is the power of God's unconditional love available to us at all times. The love Jesus offers enables us to rest in his presence and to slow down enough to breathe and be fully present to what is beautiful in this world.

Jesus says to us, "Come to me all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and you will find 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."

In the translation from Eugene Peterson, we read that Jesus invites us to an unforced rhythm of grace. A restful life is a grace-filled life.

Jesus meets us where we are and offers us a gentle presence of love to help us on the journey. He has a special heart for those who are worn out on religion. And a lot of people are worn out on religion

today. The yoke in this Scripture is the image of what an oxen has on its shoulders when it pulls a cart. When it says that the yoke of Jesus is easy or light it means that Jesus carries the yoke with us, kind of like if you and Jesus are oxen carrying a cart together. The grace of Jesus helps us with the burdens we carry each day.

The promise of Jesus is not that life is always a smooth path or smooth sailing, rather Jesus will always offer us grace to make it through the rocky roads or storms that life brings. Through Christ, we are able to find peace in the eye of the storm and sometimes Jesus will calm the storms of our lives, just as he calmed the seas when he was in the boat with the disciples. Sometimes our path will feel straight at other times we may hit some rugged land but Jesus will be our guide.

Friends, where do you need Jesus to bring you rest? What storms or rough roads are you facing? What burdens are you carrying? I want to encourage you to not go on this journey of life alone. Instead ask

for the yoke of Jesus to help you carry the load. Find a rhythm of grace so that you can experience rest rather than a hurried life. A grace filled rhythm of life is one where we rely on God's grace, God's unconditional love to guide us through. Not only do we need to rely on God, but we also need the gift of community to help us rest in grace. Our church provides that gift of community. I also was blessed recently to have an experience of rest and renewal in community that I want to share with you.

Story of finding rest with Shalom Collective...

How might our church foster a grace filled rhythm of life that opens us more to God's grace, hope, peace, and love? There may be many answers to that question.

What I decided to do here is develop monthly retreats and now we also will have three Saturday retreats this year. The monthly retreats are normally the first Friday of each month. The first Saturday retreat will be on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> and I am so happy to share that Nancy and Reid

Thurston will help facilitate a retreat that looks at spirituality and mental health.

Retreats are one way to cultivate rest. I also encourage you to consider finding a spiritual director. A spiritual director is a person you meet with monthly who helps you slow down and live a grace filled rhythm of life. A spiritual director gives you space to share your feelings and to explore your relationship with God and others, always considering the movement of God in your life. Spiritual direction is a little like therapy for your relationship with God. If you need a spiritual director, let me know and I will do my best to help you find one. I am also available to offer spiritual direction to a few people within our congregation.

Friends, we desire that Newberg First Presbyterian continues to be a grace place to grow. We are a spiritual formation church. Spiritual formation refers to the journey of growing a deeply intimate relationship with God and it refers to becoming more like Jesus by

loving the world with a heart of compassion. May the Holy Spirit open us to more fully see Jesus and show Jesus to our world through our prayers, our grace filled lives, and through our compassion for the most vulnerable. May we embody the grace, hope, peace, and love that our world so desperately needs. May we enjoy resting in grace.

One final image from nature: Watching the Crane while paddling my kayak at Hagg Lake. Crane walked slowly but when ready took off in graceful flight. May we do the same in our individual lives and as a community.

Let us pray...