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Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Zechariah 9:9-12
Psalm 145:8-14
Romans 7:15-25a
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Organization is not my strength, so I am constantly misplacing and searching for personal items – sunglasses, car keys, my favorite pen. In fact, I misplace and search for things so often that several times I have had the laughable experience of searching for something I already had but just didn't realize it.

I will tell you about a time my glasses case eluded me. The case that holds my lavender eye glass frames is sleek, tan, and leather. One morning, in search of my case, I scanned my cluttered bathroom counter, where it usually lives, and did not see it. I did a loop around the house – from nightstand to bureau, then downstairs to my desk. I turned over pillows, I even checked the car. No luck. I sighed, well, it *must* be on the bathroom counter and I just didn't see it. So I returned once again to the bathroom, only to be disappointed it wasn't there. A second time I did the loop and again, no luck. Exhausted, I gave up and continued my morning routine. As I stood in front of the mirror, brushing my teeth in the bathroom, a tan object caught my eye. Resting near the sink faucet, unobstructed and in clear view. There it was! It had been there the whole time.

Why hadn't I seen it there? It could have been all the other visual clutter, which was indeed a problem. But it was as if I was so caught up in the search that I was not open to actually finding it.

How many of you have searched for things frantically that you could not find and yet they were right in front of you all along? In plain sight, or on the top of your head, or even in your hand (which has happened to me)? I am convinced there is a name for this phenomenon, and it is not "senior moment." Otherwise I should start looking into retirement.

In the gospel reading this morning Jesus talks about rest, something that can elude us just as often if not more than misplaced personal effects.

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

How many of you are weary from carrying heavy loads? I know that many of you are, and I am too. Maybe the loneliness and isolation of this pandemic is just too much to bear. Maybe you are struggling with finances or putting food on the table or personal health issues. Maybe you are concerned for a loved one who is facing one or more of these things. Friends, one thing I can tell you this morning is that you are not alone.

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

When Jesus says take my yoke upon you, he is referring not to a single but to a double yoke. One of those wooden cross bars that joins two cattle together at the neck, so that the two cattle can walk together, pulling the load together. In Jesus' time, double-yokes were more common than single yokes. So Jesus is ready and willing to pull the load with us, if we would only join him by opening our hearts to him and walking in his ways. Just like our lost glasses that are actually on our head, or our phone that it is our back pocket of that pair of pants that we are wearing, we can forget that Jesus is here, ready and willing to help us carry the load. We must disabuse ourselves of the illusion that he is absent by practicing awareness of his continual, abiding presence.

We can become so committed to carrying our burdens on our own, without even realizing it. We can shut out others out of fear of burdening them. And maybe those fears are founded, but maybe not. Regardless, God has a bountiful Spirit that is never exhausted by your concerns. In fact, God longs to hear them because He cares for you. God has a bountiful Spirit, so bountiful and abundant, that God can never tire from carrying our load with us.

Spending time with Jesus when we are weary can help us in so many ways. It can remind us we are not alone in this. That we have a God who went through a harrowing journey of suffering, and came out on the other side glorious and victorious and that that is our destiny too. Time with Jesus can remind us that there is hope, there is comfort, there is healing. It can help us to see the situation burdening us through God's eyes, which can often provide a sense of relief – that relief we've been seeking everywhere but through Him.

It can remind us that we do not have to achieve or earn God's love.

People pray differently, and something that works for one person may not work for the next, and that's okay. What types of prayer help you open to God?

Do you like to talk aloud to God while you're gardening, or going for a walk?

Do you like to write to God as you would a letter to a friend?

Do you prefer to walk a labyrinth, gradually gaining awareness of God's presence as you meander the winding paths?

Do you delight in God's presence best when you are sitting on your back porch at night, listening to the crickets chirp and watching the fireflies gather?

And let's not forget Scripture or our Book of Common Prayer! Devotionals and the daily office of prayer, which includes morning, noonday, evening prayer, and the nighttime compline service, can direct our minds to passages and verses that ooze with sacred richness, that draw us nearer to abundance as we silently repeat them to ourselves throughout the day.

What works for you? I encourage you to explore new forms of prayer and study that help you to spend time with God. I also encourage you to recall those practices that have worked for you and God in the past, and return to those. Return to them now. God is waiting to meet you there.

And sometimes what we need more than anything is do something fun! God likes to laugh, too, you know! Jesus went to wedding banquets, and I'm sure he danced and cracked a few jokes.

I heard someone on the radio the other day say that eating a bowl of ice cream while watching your favorite television show can be a sacred activity, so long as a certain attention and presence is brought to the activity. So what does that mean?

I believe that if there are any activities which we truly enjoy, which we do just for the fun of it, God is with us there and is delighted that we are doing them. There's this state of mind which I am sure many of you have heard of, it's called "flow," and it basically means you are so absorbed in what you are doing that you aren't thinking about anything else. You're just fully present. Playing the guitar is like that for me. What are those rituals or activities that bring you to a state of flow? If you're fully there, fully in it, God is rejoicing in your delight.

That ability to experience delight is God-given and is part of God's essence. God isn't all serious. Enthusiasm is just another word for the Holy Spirit. So when we do something we love, and we experience that sense of focus and pleasure, we are tapping into an energy greater than ourselves, and that energy, my friends, is God.

God is already with you wherever you go and wherever you are on your life's journey. Whatever loads you are carrying, bring them to God in prayer. Ask for the Spirit's healing presence and perspective. Lift your burdens to God in prayer. Allow God to help you carry the load. Jesus is already there, waiting for you to turn your attention toward him. So stop searching and just relax into what is already here. Jesus is here, ready and willing to help you carry the load.