

# Who are we?

*“Come to me, all you that are weary and are 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30*

So I have been trying to meet as many of you as possible in the first few weeks of this appointment and this time at Bee Creek. So many of you have been welcoming and shared what is going on in your life and why you love the church and your hopes and dreams and things like that. I have been trying to make some appointments and meet with people as we can. I made an appointment to meet with a family to stop by with a lawn chair. They emailed me back and said, “well, actually, something came up that night, but on Thursday, we will be up at the church with the girl scouts and boy scouts cleaning out the rain barrels, if you want to come by.” So I thought that I should probably come by.

So I came and there were people inside of the barrels. These are 4500-gallon tanks that were donated to the church for the Pharmacy Community Garden expansion on our property which is happening as we speak. We should be almost ready to plant by the end of the month. There are some workdays coming up if you are interested. It is pretty amazing what people have been able to do.

At first, before it got started, they wanted to clean out the tanks to make sure there were not large chunks of debris which would clog the pipes when water started flowing. When I showed up that night, there were a few Boys Scouts who were quite thin already inside of the tanks and scraping from the inside. You need masks to be inside because the dust was everywhere. The scouts eventually got out to take a break and no one was going in so I realized that it was my turn to enter the tank. And I don't know about you, but if you have never been inside of a 4500-gallon tank that is empty, it is a different experience: it is large, it is kind of dark but not too dark, it is disorienting. There is dust everywhere, especially as I was scraping more dust down. It was hard to ascertain exactly where I was because all I could see was orange-tinted darkness. It also took a lot of faith to trust that the people outside whom I had just met not to push me down, rolling like a hamster wheel down the hill, which would not be a great first impression for the community. It is was good to be in there, to realize what was going on, to get a new perspective of the campus and what was being built.

My brothers and sisters, we are starting a new sermon series called *Mapping the Future*, looking at where we are, where we are going, and what we can do while we are there. To take new perspectives about the place, and that does not mean that everyone has to climb into a 4500 gallon tank, but realize in the midst of this strange season, we have an opportunity to look afresh at where we are, to take a chance to see that maybe there are some places that we have missed in our area; in our spiritual lives, as well as in our physical surroundings that God is calling us to go to.

The scripture for today comes from Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

First of all, what is a yoke. Yoke is one of those funny words that kind sounds like another word that is more common: yolk, like an egg yolk. You have to announce very clearly to make sure people don't think Jesus is distributing eggs, but yoke.

The yoke was the piece of wood that would go on the laboring animal, on the ox or the mule or the donkey that would usually be connected to a plow in order to prepare the soil. Or it would be connected to a wagon or a cart to move something. But in this context especially it would be for a plow. It was for preparing the soil for the planting season, for the growth, for the agricultural bounty that was going to support the community and the family.

Now some soils are more ready to be worked than others. Before the barrels were placed here behind the gym, the land had to be prepared. It didn't need to be plowed, but it did need to be ready to hold three 4500-gallon tanks, and that is a lot of weight once they are full of water. So the plateau that they sit on needs to be prepared well. So this preparation has taken longer than expected. Over the last few weeks, three tractors broke in the process and a dump truck broke in the process. And really, if it wasn't for Judy Wisdom driving her tractor down here it wouldn't have worked out. We can think of tractors as well as modern yokes, and not even tractors were prepared for this ground and this soil. They could not handle it. There are times in our life and places in our life when the soil is hard and it doesn't seem like anything is going to grow. There are also times in our life when we feel like we know what the arable land of our life is. Even if we are not farmers, we know where fruitfulness is going to come from. We have these living maps which we inhabit. The places that we go, the people that we see, we know what to expect from those relationships. We know where our kids are going to go (roughly), we know what our job is going to look like, we know what our daily patterns, we know what our volunteering is going to look like. We have these habits which continue. We know what relaxation is going to look like. We know to expect to take the boat out on the lake or to go to the beech. We have these habits which prepare us for the land that is worth working where our yoke is going to work well.

As well, we have places *around* us that we don't really go to often, that seem kind of dry, that seem kind of "what's the point." Or it seems like it would be really hard to prepare that soil for the planting.

Before we know where we are going, we need to know where we are. You need to have a departure location in order to get to your destination. And so many of you have been a part of this church for long time and you have been coming to worship for a long time. You have had your Sunday school classes and small groups and your children have gone through the children's and youth ministry programs. And all of these connections, but now we have a chance to look at the church in a new way. Many of us have not been coming to the campus for a while. It seems different. The patterns of life are different. And so it is an opportunity to look afresh and ask the question, "where are we as a church? Where are we in our faith? One way to physically realize that is to look at a new kind of map.

This is a 7.5-minute map, a quarter map from the US Geological Survey for our area. I have six of these now in my office that cover from Spicewood to Mansfield Dam. They cover the entire area of our mission field of Bee Creek United Methodist Church. Showing all the creeks, showing all the roads, showing where everyone in this area actually lives. To remind us that our mission field is much broader

than the people who are already present at the church, and I think we must especially remember that in times like this we don't see each other regularly, when we don't have the wonderful fellowship that Bee Creek is known for, the camaraderie, the hugs and the greetings and the cares for each other that we are so accustomed to. So how do we see afresh our space in this time.

One of the things that we are trying to do, especially over the month of August, is to try to open up opportunities in the wonderful outdoor spaces of our campus. In our amphitheater, where we are going to start our Evensong service as a way of praying together in a safe way and preparing for the week. Evensong is not just a carbon copy of other worship experiences at Bee Creek.

We are going to offer other opportunities to safely come together to enjoy the assets of our facilities. There are going to be wonderful opportunities to volunteer at the Farmacy as we prepare to get these tanks filled with water and to start building raised beds to grow in this soil. As well, expanding the trails around here. So we can build up our facility of where we are, but also need to understand who is around us.

Now most of you live pretty close to the church, most of the members of the church live in the 669 Zip-code, which is wonderful, but also shows the possibilities of the mission field beyond that, of the people in need of Jesus, in need of hope and care and protection especially in this time. People who are hurting in this time. People who are feeling lonely in this time. People who are feeling weary in this time.

When Jesus says, come to me all you who are weary and I will give you rest, I think it is important to realize that first, Jesus is talking to us. That when we are weary, we can go to God and find our rest. And that when we try to plow this land that busted three tractors by our self, we are just going to get frustrated, and we need to let Jesus take the wheel of that tractor, we need to let Jesus be our yoke, and that he is going to prepare the soil for the planting.

As well, Jesus isn't just talking to us in the times when we feel weary but to the people around us who are weary whom we may not even see that well. The church is not just for the people who are there but is an outpost of the kingdom of God, of grace, of mercy, and we need to see ourselves as part of that outpost, as a welcoming space for those who are weary. And one of the great purposes in starting to meet outside and meet in person safely in the amphitheater, in these great facilities that we have, is to offer opportunities for visitors, offer opportunities for guests, to people who have not connected with a church community, maybe people who are not familiar with a church to begin with, or people who have had bad experiences in the past, and stepping into our amphitheater is a lot different than stepping through the doors of a church. And stepping into a new space and realizing that worship can look a little different, praise can look a little different, prayer can look a little different.

Christ welcomes us when we are tired, but Christ wants us to admit those times when we are tired, when we are honest, because when we admit that, we admit our need for Christ in our life. When we admit that we cannot save ourselves, we cannot plow this land by ourselves. We open our hearts up to Christ and to God and to being transformed into the image of God more fully than we ever could on

our own. To have our hearts filled with the love of Christ, to realize that we cannot do it on our own, and how that frees us to fully love our neighbor and to actually love ourselves and realize that in Christ entering our hearts in new full ways that we can offer Christ in our community in new and full ways. Who are we? Where are we? As a staff, we have been trying to look at that. Our staff has reached out to most of you over the last few weeks, to talk about where you are in this season, how you are doing, what is going on in your life. How you have connected or not connected to the church. We have been trying to figure out who we are in this season so that we can look forward.

As I said, this series is called *Mapping the Future* because our goal is to map what the future of Bee Creek looks like, where we are going as a church, and how we can be a location of Christ's love in this community. A beacon on a hill for those who are weary, for those who are tired, for those who are in need of Christ's rest, so that we can be renewed in Christ's rest and offer rest to others. So that we can be reminded that we don't need to save ourselves, we don't need to carry the load, that Christ is carrying the load.

Sometimes Christ may ask us to step inside a few 4500 gallon tanks or places that we may not expect, but Christ will be with us. Sometimes Christ may ask us to make a phone call or to reach out to someone with whom we did not expect to communicate, but Christ will be with us. And offering Christ in this world, offering the yoke of Christ, is not about being perfect but letting God speak through us. That God can speak through you when you open yourself up. You are a vessel of Christ's love in this world, you are a vessel of Christ's peace in this world. Thanks be to God.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.