

# Harmony Church

## February 2012

An invitation is probably one of the most exciting pieces of mail that a person can receive. Even without knowing the contents of an envelope, we sometimes have a feeling that an invitation is enclosed. And when the invitation is extended by telephone, we usually express our excitement by the tone of our voice in the conversation. But once received, the invitation calls for a response.

Likewise, Jesus extends to all of us a very special invitation, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:29)

Every invitation has a host, a person invited--the guest, and the object for which the invitation is extended. In this case Jesus does the inviting. It is addressed to "all who labor and are heavy laden." The object is to help those who accept to find meaning and purpose in their life struggle. But Jesus personalizes the invitation, and offers himself in personal involvement. This makes the invitation unique--different from a general statement of concern or an offer to commiserate with persons weighed down with the burdens of life. Yet, it is important to ask why we should accept this invitation. What is our motivation to be involved in following Jesus?

First, Jesus says, "My yoke is easy." This image reminds us that we are all related [yoked] to someone--or something--in this life. We are never free in the sense of isolation, of individualism that has no responsibility to anyone or anything. Christ does not say that our yoking will be destroyed, but that with him the yoke is shared and directed. With him, life has purpose and meaning precisely because we are yoked. To be yoked with Christ not only insures the right direction, but assures us of joy in service. Discipleship becomes fellowship with Christ and his other followers.

Secondly, Jesus says, "My burden is light." Please note that he did not say, "I will take away your burden or relieve you of having any burden just because you follow me." No, in discipleship we take unto ourselves his burden--and it is light. Isn't this what Jesus meant when he stated that each disciple must take up the "cross" and follow him? Doesn't "cross," in this context, mean the shared burden of Christ which he offers to us?

Do you remember how Father Flanagan of Boys' Town fame in Omaha, Nebraska built his wonderful institution for homeless boys with a picture and a slogan? It was a picture of a teenage boy carrying another boy--almost his same size--on his back. The words beneath simply read, "He ain't heavy, he's my brother." To carry our brothers and sisters in Christ with him, while being yoked to him, is to accept the invitation to "take" and to "learn."

To say, "My burden is light" is to remind all of us that life was not meant to be work-free, or mere existence. There is purpose and there is a reward to the faithful, to those who accept the invitation.

What is that purpose? What is that reward?

"I will give your rest," says Jesus. And "You will find rest for your souls." Now "rest" in Jesus' terms is not release from your command--your post in the kingdom--but rejuvenation.

"Rest" as the Bible uses the term, is not granting laziness--doing nothing--but being able to do what you were meant to do, without undo pressures or strain and unbearable burdens.

We must not forget that Christ's invitation was extended to "all who labor and are heavy laden." I think this applies to most of us, most of the time. Often the burdens of life and the cares of daily living get us "down." This word tells us that Christ is aware of that struggle. He extends the invitation in simple elementary terms. I pray that we will all "R.S.V.P." Christ's invitation with much haste.

Grace and Peace,  
Pastor Larry