

*25At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Yesterday after the Men's Bible Study I visited the Muir family, Mike and Kathy and Ethan. They had asked me to stop to talk about their joining the church and to plan for Ethan's baptism. As we talked, Ethan was exploring. He's ten months old – on his feet, moving along the furniture. Bumping his head here, disturbing the cat, reaching for a pen, straining to grab a cup of coffee, never stopping - intensely interested in learning about his world. He keeps his parents busy.

As I watched Ethan I thought about fear. You see, I had been planning to make this my anti-fear sermon. Fear is bad, faith is good. If you are deciding what to do in life based on fear you are making a mistake. Yes, that is what I had been intending to preach. But watching Ethan I thought that there are some things I hope Ethan will learn to fear. If he hurts the cat, that cat may someday hurt him. If he does not learn to fear pulling heavy objects off of tables serious injury could result. I was delighted to see his curious spirit – I hope it is never crushed. But I also hope he will learn to fear speeding cars, and getting too close to fire and wandering too far from his parents while he is still young. For some fears protect us.

I think of a practice in the early church that is still practiced by some Christians today – snake handling. To handle poisonous snakes and not to fear them is a great demonstration of faith but as I see things is also very foolish. God gave us the emotion of fear for a reason – to protect us. That day when Jesus and his disciples were out on the stormy sea and terrified, the disciples awakened Jesus begging him to save them, Jesus calmed the storm. Then Jesus rebuked the disciples, asking, "Why were you afraid?" Jesus wanted his disciples to have faith,

even in the violent storms in this world. But I don't think Jesus would want us to put ourselves in harms way by going out on Lake Erie when small craft warnings are posted.

Watching Ethan reminded me that this is not a matter of either or – either faith or fear. In our hearts there is a movement back and forth between the two – sometimes more fear than faith, sometimes more faith than fear.

Jesus said, “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.”

When I hear these words of Jesus I think of what makes me feel burdened by life and far too often it is fear. Fear of what the world is coming to – fear of the threat of violence – fear that harder times are coming – fear that climate change will lead to hunger and shortage – fear of aging, fear of sickness, fear of dying. Fear.

When my children were younger I carried some other fears – fear that they would not have the chance to do all they were capable of doing – fear of their being left behind – fear of eating disorders, drug use, irresponsible living – fear of people who might harm them.

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

It is a heavy burden to carry fear for yourself, fear for those you love. For fear is a relentless taskmaster, pushing us to do more for the kids, to save more money for tomorrow, to always be on the watch. Fear gives us no rest.

Jesus promises rest from these burdens. “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.”

Learn from Jesus. Take his yoke. Jesus looked to his Father in heaven in every time of need. I know he wants us to learn to do the same. Sometimes Jesus would get up early in the morning to pray. Sometimes after a long day he would go off by himself to pray. Constantly he was being renewed in relationship with his Father.

And Jesus responded to people – friend and stranger alike. He even took time to speak to those who were intent on destroying him – he argued with them, tried to convince them of his way.

But Jesus did not seem to spend a lot of time worrying about his own safety, or whether he would have enough for tomorrow. Give us this day our daily bread, he teaches us to pray.

Jesus wants you to be like him – turning to your Father in heaven not only in times of need but in beginning your day, in ending your day, taking time for prayer.

Jesus wants you to be like him, paying attention to all the folks God is sending your way each day. They will come into your life with many joys and sorrows you can share. Their troubles will keep you so busy you will not have any time to be anxious and worried about your own.

In all of this you will find rest for your soul. The stock market will still be going up and down, and terrorists will still be plotting somewhere and diseases will be attacking but in prayer and in service you will be busy enough so that you will not be so burdened with worry.