

B.T.D.T.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 | 7/9/2017

Have you ever watched extreme sports, the kind they sometimes use in commercials for the soft drink "Mountain Dew"? Exhausting! The television screen is filled with frenetic action. Young men and women catapulting out of airplanes on snowboards, leaping off cliffs while wearing parachutes, hurtling down rugged mountains on mostly airborne bicycles, and rollerblading through complete loop-the-loops.

There's a saying that used to be quite popular, but that you still hear sometimes - "Been there, done that" It works both negatively and positively. On the one hand, it can act as a dismissal -- "been there, done that, got the T-shirt." So why do it again? Give me something new to try.

On the other hand, this phrase can also signal affirmation. Kids sharing common experiences -- good or bad -- nod their heads and testify that they, too, have been there and have done that. Whether it's being dumped by a boyfriend or girlfriend or getting all the classes you wanted in school, sharing the experience with someone who has actually "been there and done that" can bring comfort that eases pain or enhances the joy of a positive experience.

"Been there, done that" is a common phrase that can either be a sincere affirmation or a flip dismissal. Likewise, "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy laden" was an idiomatic phrase in Jesus' day. He was not the first sage, teacher or preacher to offer that comforting invitation.

In a time when human beings were beasts of burden just as often as animals, this image had real power. In an age with no concept of "the weekend," the mandates of traditional Jewish Sabbath laws of "rest" had always been exceedingly inviting. In a culture that believed in a pantheon of quarrelsome, unpredictable gods, the notion of a safe and secure "rest" from such unreliable and often self-serving deities was the answer to prayer.

Jesus' words, then, sounded familiar--but to a few who had seen Jesus' miracles and heard Jesus' message, this "come to me" phrase had an unmatched depth and resonance. For those who had caught the vision of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, this promise of "rest" was real. As Messiah, Jesus offered a glimpse into the kingdom, into a place where burdens grew weightless.

So what does our culture offer all who are "weary and heavy laden"--all who have "been there, done that"?

--"gadget" catalogs that offer us a million kinds of merchandise guaranteed to make our lives easier.

--computer software programs that offer us new ways to pay monthly bills, organize our taxes, keep track of expenses and plan our calendars.

--health clubs that offer us personalized fitness programs designed to make us thinner, firmer and friskier.

--cable television that offers us endless entertainment, endless sports events, a few educational opportunities and perpetual infomercials.

Not bad things in and of themselves. But do any of these really offer us rest?

How many catalogs can you look at before you've seen it all?

How much time can you spend on Facebook responding to your "friends" requests to "forward this to 20 friends and me if you truly are my friend" before you feel tired, bored, abused and anything but rested?

How many times can you climb the Stairmaster before your body reminds you--you've "been there, done that"? Or sit on a bike with an electronic screen that says you have gone 5 miles before you realize the scenery hasn't changed at all?

How many different channels have you flipped past before you were convinced that Bruce Springsteen got it right years ago. Back in a time when there were far fewer channels, he wrote a song entitled "57 Channels and Nothing On"!

One of postmodern culture's fantasies that feeds our inherent weariness, our perpetually overburdened souls, is the notion that we must all be "self-made." We sometimes expend as much energy trying to decide what we will make ourselves into this year, this week, this day, this job, this marriage, this friendship--as we do actually becoming that person and enjoying being that person.

Do you remember Howard Hughes, one of the richest and most powerful men in the world? One who could honestly say about much of life, from dating movie stars to flying planes, "Been there, done that"?

When Hughes' emaciated body was removed from the Acapulco Princess Hotel, there were no personal belongings other than a movie screen, projector and sound system. His poor relatives had to buy one of the world's richest men some burial clothes.

James Phelan, in his book *Howard Hughes: The Hidden Years* wrote "He was the epitome of what the American dream had become in the latter half of the 20th century -- wealth beyond comprehension, the unbridled power implicit in such wealth, the mindless thrust of unleashed technology. His money had fertilized industrial plants that pushed U.S. science into new frontiers, put a camera on the moon and sent communication satellites orbiting above the world. But he himself could hardly communicate with anyone. In the end, the money overwhelmed him and all those who held it in awe; in the end, his life funneled down to a small, darkened bedroom where his wealth served no purpose except to buy him the total seclusion that his ... existence required."

By comparison, Jesus' invitation to rest is more than skin-deep. It is peace for the soul. Christ is our real rest. Christ is our real peace.

When Jesus offers to share our burdens by becoming our "yoke-mate," the weight of all this "image-production" baggage quietly slips off our shoulders. Jesus' yoke--though "easy" and the burden "light"--nonetheless gives us direction and purpose for our lives. We no longer need to create and re-create ourselves--we are now being gently re-sculpted into Christ's likeness.

Think about it for a minute. No matter where you may or may not have been, no matter what you have or have not done, you are sure of one thing. By the grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, you will experience eternal life and endless joy. Compared to that, what do the burdens and the weariness of this life really amount to?

Ever notice how those who have genuinely yoked their lives to Jesus don't seem to think they are "missing out" on anything? The perfect freedom and fulfillment that come from a life lived in Jesus' "rest" allow disciples of Christ to look at all life's distractions and frustrations and affirm with a shake of our heads--"no thanks--been there, done that."

Pastor Keith