guidance and strength make our burdens manageable. If we carry the weight alone it can feel crushing.  Jesus’ yoke aligns with our purpose and provides us with rest and joy even in challenges and new beginnings.  Easy means it transforms how we carry our burdens, giving us peace and strength for our journey.  As we surrender to Him, we experience a shift from self-reliance to dependence on Him, walking with God in his strength, guidance and grace.

I have a daily devotional I was reading in December called Breath as Prayer:  I would like to share a reading with you from that book:

“If we were holding the pen, we’d probably write our stories differently.  Perhaps we'd edit out a particular section that wasn’t pleasant or skip over a bit that required some learning and growth.  But His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

Trying to understand the ways of God is like trying to describe the depths of the entire ocean by studying only a single drop of seawater.  There is just so much we can’t see, so much we don’t know and so much God has in store for us that we will comprehend only when we see Him face to face.”

So when the burdens don’t make sense, when you have more questions than answers, when you don't understand what God is doing, remember that He sees far more than you can and His thoughts are far higher than yours.  You may never be able to fully understand the ways of God, but you don’t have to.  You can trust that His ways are for your good, to bring you closer to Him and to grow in you in holiness.

The last few weeks I have been talking about how Jesus walks with us in new beginnings.  Last week I talked about when we experience trials and burdens and new beginnings if we remain in Jesus, he will remain in us and help us be fruitful even through difficult times.  During difficult times and new beginnings, we can embrace them with joy as we grow closer to God.  And today, take rest, lay your burdens down.

So I encourage you to embrace new beginnings with confidence in Jesus' promise of an easy yoke.  Accept his invitation, for deep soul level rest.  Go to him, all who are weary and burdened and he will give you rest.

Thanks be to God, amen.

**Y**ou know the saying “we can’t judge a book by its cover”  We really can’t can we? We meet people everyday without knowing much that is going on in their life.  We see them put together on the outside, but have no idea of the burdens they carry.

***“New Beginnings – Take Rest in Me”***

*January 19th 2025 — Selby United Church – Scripture* *Matthew 11:28-30*

*By Tricia Cammaart*

One of my jobs as a holistic health practitioner is a fitness instructor.  (And I really love this job!) I show up about 15 minutes before class.  I greet everyone and everyone greets me.  We put on happy smiles because it is nice to see a pleasant smiley face.  We workout together, and the workouts are sometimes tough but after the class the endorphins are going through us and we are feeling happy and great, and we leave class feeling wonderful.  You can tell why I really like it. Everyone is always happy! Despite the hard work it is a great atmosphere!

But there are stressors for all of us that lie underneath our smiles, and the same is true for the women in my fitness classes.  Sometimes after class they will take some time to chat with me and each other and share their burdens.  They let me know how they are doing with a specific injury or their health journey or give me an update on the burdens of their life.  In these moments I would have never guessed what they are going through, but it means a lot to me that they trust in me and can find some solace in sharing.

But as you know, sometimes it is hard to take others burdens repeatedly. Jeff, my husband, used to do fitness training with a lot of people when he worked at a gym in Belleville.  When you are fitness training, people would share their life with Jeff, their burdens, people can still share their life while they are doing bicep curls.  On Fridays when he would come home from work, he would be completely spent.  No capacity left, he would need to sit silently and rest, and I would be the excited wife ready to take on some kind of home renovation because the weekend had come, and we now had free time. This would be the last thing that Jeff would want to do when he got home on a Friday.  He had taken on too many burdens throughout the week.

We can all experience weariness and burden, especially during a season of change or new beginnings.  And for our church we are experiencing this, our search committee is working hard at trying to get all the pieces put together so we can find and hire a new minister.  We also have committees that are coping with change, our group programs are dealing with change.  All this change is a burden.  More work, uncertainty, and a feeling of unrest.

Jesus says “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

This **invitation** that Jesus is giving is not directed solely at 1 person, but an invitation to everyone. No one is excluded.  And this includes those burdened by life’s challenges, past mistakes, and fears of the unknown.

When we think of rest, we think of sleeping in late, vacations, a day off of work, binging on Netflix all day.  But this is just temporary relief.  This rest will not last, because all those burdens are still going to be there when the movie is done.

Jesus wants to give us deep soul level rest.  This rest is not just a pause from everyday activities but a restoration of peace and strength.

How do we get this restoration and strength? We accept Jesus’ invitation - Come to me, he says.  We pray, we trust, we surrender.  We must lay our burdens at his feet as a starting point for a new beginning.

What burdens do you need to lay before Jesus?  Please lay them down.

Jesus says, “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.”

We studied this scripture in our youth group.  The wording was a bit hard for the teens to understand so we broke it down.  I thought we could break it down a bit here as well.

I asked the kids if they knew what yoke meant.  One person answered, “the yellow of an egg” Yes you are right, but that is spelt y-o-l-k not y-o-k-e.  I thought that was funny!

So let’s talk about yoke.  A yoke is a wooden beam or frame that is used to join two animals (typically oxen) together, allowing them to work in unison, such as pulling a plow or a cart. It helps distribute the weight and effort of the load between the animals.

**I**n a figurative sense, the term "yoke" can represent the responsibilities, obligations, or burdens that people carry in life.

A **heavy yoke** might symbolize difficult struggles, such as hard work, stress, or challenges.

A **light or easy yoke**, as described by Jesus, suggests an easier and more manageable burden because of His guidance and help.

Jesus uses the yoke imagery to invite people to join with Him, promising that the load they carry will be lighter and easier because He walks alongside them. Instead of bearing life's burdens alone, we are "yoked" with Him, and He provides rest, support, and peace.

In our new beginning here at Selby, we are joining together to share the tasks at hand.  We are yoking!  We are collaborating and offering each other support.   Support in the office, support with our Sunday morning services, support with our children’s ministry.  The search committee is sharing the workload of the minister search.  The tasks are made easier through partnership and collaboration.

“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.”

Taking Jesus yoke means that we can release our heavy burdens that we were never meant to carry alone.  Jesus is walking alongside us day and night guiding and strengthening us.

We want to be like Jesus, he is the example of how we want to live.  I imagine that if Jesus had a burden, he didn’t get filled with stress and anxiety and fear.  When Jesus was burdened, he turned to his Father.  He spent time alone with him, he spent as much or more time with his father than he did with people.  And should we not take a lesson from his example?  When in stressful times, turn to God.

A powerful example of Jesus taking rest in God can be found in the story of **Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane**

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. He was deeply troubled and overwhelmed, knowing the suffering He was about to face, but Jesus sought rest and strength in God.

Jesus' depended on God, even in His moment of greatest sorrow and fear. He prayed seeking God's guidance and strength to fulfill His mission. Through prayer, Jesus surrendered His will to God's plan and found the peace and strength to continue, even knowing what he had to face.

True rest is not found in doing it alone, it is not found in isolation.  That’s why we meet with friends for coffee or for a walk or for a visit.  We find rest when we share, when someone carries our yoke with us.  It’s why the ladies after fitness class will come and talk to me.  To share the burden.  But it is also found in walking in step with Jesus.  We will have renewed strength and purpose when we align our lives with his will.

In this scripture Jesus invites us to exchange yokes “he says take my yoke upon you and learn from me……. and you will find rest for your souls”

Where can you exchange your burdens with Jesus? Where can we as a congregation exchange our burdens with Jesus during our new beginnings.

And how does it feel to be released from a heavy burden?

Maybe at work you have been waiting patiently for a job promotion, you know the promotion will come with added benefits, a pay raise and more vacation and sick days.  This is just what you need to help support your family.  Finally, the day comes and you get that promotion! A burden has been lifted.  How do you feel?

Maybe you have been arguing with some family members and it is causing you so much stress, fear, anger and anxiety.  One day you sit down with those family members, and you have a heart to heart, and everything is made right.  Your burden has been lifted! How does it feel?

It feels great to have a burden lifted.  My son is going to study in Ireland in September.  I was very worried about finances for him, how he was going to afford tuition, and the cost of living is so high.  Will we be able to get a loan from the bank for him, I hope we can make this awesome opportunity work for him.  I have been praying over this, and really giving this burden to God.  He is going and that is that, and there is no sense in worrying about it.  Well, I just found out that he can apply for an Ontario Grant that will help cover the majority of the cost of his tuition and cost of living.  A burden lifted, and let me tell you it feels amazing, like a prayer has been answered.

Jesus says, “For my yoke is easy” This doesn’t mean that new beginnings are a piece of cake or free from challenges.  “Easy” means that Jesus' yoke is perfectly suited for us. Jesus'