



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

MATTHEW 11

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A Safe Place

Who among us has not been alarmed by news reports of how divided our society has become? People on both sides of the political aisle roll their eyes when they hear those on the opposing side demanding safe places and refusing to even listen to opposing views (much less allowing them space on their Facebook news feeds).

It seems we have become so fragile that we can't endure the tension of being challenged to think beyond our own opinions. While certainly not a sign of a healthy culture, this fragility does reflect the deep need for all people to find a safe place. Rapidly growing discoveries in the field of brain science are confirming what Jesus declared a couple thousand years ago. In fact, Jesus was simply elaborating on what the megastory of biblical history has emphasized for thousands of years.

Ancient Hebrews commonly used the phrase "in the bosom of Abraham" to refer to ultimate "safety" reflecting the

joy of a safe place being connected to a safe person. In the beginning, God created a safe place in the Garden of Eden by being there himself to walk and talk with his people. The ark that Noah built was a safe place for his family in the midst of the great flood. The very camp of Israel as they marched through the desert to the Promised Land had safety in its design. Jerusalem was prized because it was surrounded by mountains that made invasion difficult. The precious walls of Jerusalem were about a safe place for God's people to live and do business. So, it was not a new idea when Jesus, the ultimate safe person, invited vulnerable people to come to him for safety.

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“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:28–30 ESV)

God has always been interested in our living in the safety of his presence and provision. We are designed to live in peace as we align with the order of his transcendent kingdom. It was the disorder of sin that disrupted that peace. Feeling alienated from God and thus afraid, Adam and Eve hid. We have been imitating that behavior for the same reason ever since. However, fear is not the emotion that produces good decisions because fear motivates us to react rather than to respond to real or perceived threats. Fear activates our fight, flight, or freeze instinct. When we act out of fear, the cognitive function of our brain is shut down. The safety that comes from the experience of unconditional and unending love allows us to think and function in the peace and order of our original design. That kind of love is a rare and treasured commodity. It is found in God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, God expelled them from the Garden. They were made for the Garden and for the partnership with God they enjoyed there. Outside, they were vulnerable to substitute promises of safety. History reveals how their descendants gave themselves to idols and were tormented by fear and its fruit. Life on earth is fraught with trauma. Unsatisfied desires, unfulfilled relationships, unreached goals, and uncontrollable events leave us feeling threatened. When the lion roars (see 1 Peter 5:8), we tremble in fear of losing the means by which we make life work. We fear for our physical lives, our emotional stability, our relational viability, and our motivational purpose. We live with a tolerated angst. Sometimes we seek relief in substances and processes that make us feel good at the moment, but exact devastating costs in the long term.

We need a safe place with a safe person. It is not as easy to find a safe person as one might think. A safe person must have the maturity to listen instead of giving advice. They must validate your pain as real instead of dismissing it. They do not judge or condemn you for your behavior. They are inviolably confidential.

Obviously, people who are feeling threatened themselves don't make for safe people. Sadly, too many of us have been betrayed by bearing our soul to a person we thought was safe but proved not to be. Jesus was making his disciples into people of safety by the way he treated their wounds and failures. In his presence, they found that it was safe to admit to being undone because they were never unloved. For instance, when Peter miserably failed in the hour of temptation, Jesus prayed for him and restored him by reminding him of the love Peter had experienced. He then sent Peter out to be a safe person for the sheep of God's pasture (see John 21).

When Jesus invited the bruised and burdened to come find rest, he invited them to come to him—personally. They were not told to believe in some doctrine of rest, nor to follow some steps of improvement. They were to come to him. Only in being connected to him, yoked with him, would it be possible to live in the rest that he promised. That presents a problem for many of us. Jesus was physically with them. They could see him, hear him, and touch him. Today, we struggle with his invisibility, so we opt for believing concepts and employing principles instead.

However, the relational interchange of his joy to replace our anxiety still requires our coming to him. Without his presence, we are wondering what he would do if he were here. As we pay attention to his discussion with his disciples just before his betrayal, we discover why and how the Holy Spirit will comfort them. **He will make the union with Jesus and the Father real** (see John 14:20). We can come to him personally just as surely as the first disciples did. We are not at a disadvantage because Jesus has ascended; on the contrary, we have the advantage.

There may be some mental obstacles blocking our expectation of his presence. Probably the largest one is the fear that he doesn't really want to come to us. Somehow, we are too sinful, or too insignificant for him to make himself real to us. We doubt he will be there when we finally come to admit we are weary and heavy laden. That is a lie from hell that denies the very essence of the incarnation. God so loved us that he came from heaven to be with us. He left the completeness of heaven's glory to walk the shadowlands of earth as a man so he could be with us. When Jesus announced his mission, he declared that he was anointed and sent

to the poor, brokenhearted, captives, and bruised. He loves being with us. He is eager. And it is not because we have such great faith. It is because he has such great love. He is the safe place we have been looking for since the Garden. He gives us his ear. He has time for us to tell him our story, and he will enter our pain with us. He gives us his life, and he promises to never leave us.

Edmond S. Lorenz's hymn, "Tell It To Jesus," reflects the safety found in our Savior:

Are you weary, are you heavy hearted?

Tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus.

Are you grieving over joys departed?

Tell it to Jesus alone.

*Do the tears flow down your
cheeks unbidden?*

Tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus.

*Have you sins that to men's eyes are
hidden?*

Tell it to Jesus alone.

Tell it to Jesus, tell it to Jesus.

He is a Friend that's well-known;

You've no other such a friend or brother.

Tell it to Jesus alone.

Those who come to him find a family. People who have already come and are still coming to him become reflections of him and offer a safe place to discover how big and good he is. God is sharing incarnational intent with us. We find rest and become conduits of that rest to those who are traumatized by life. We know that it is ok with Jesus and his true people if we are not ok. We are conscious of our desperate need of him and grateful for his faithful provision for our needs. His target audience of bruised, broken, and battered people are our people. We live to reflect his mercy as we learn to be safe people for others.

If you feel threatened by the traumas of life, there is a safe place waiting for you. He delights in being with you.



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