

Hannah Athanasiadis

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FINDING PEACE AMIDST CHAOS

Matthew 11:25-30

I want to tell you about a trip I took back in 2017, to India. It was a very special trip. It was an interfaith spiritual pilgrimage led by a Tibetan Buddhist teacher. There were a number of us on this trip who flew in from all over the world, all coming from different faith backgrounds. Some like myself had grown up in the Christian tradition, others were spiritual but not quite religious, and others were contemplating becoming Buddhist. All of us were spiritual seekers eager to experience spirituality from a different perspective.

It was an incredible trip, we visited so many different sacred sites. One such place was in the city of Dehli where we attended a Sufi festival. Now Dehli is a very large city. If you've ever been to Dehli or a city like Dehli, you'll know that the experience of being in a city like that is very different from being in a city like Toronto. The population alone is about 5 times the size of Toronto's, and densely packed together. Now our teacher had told us before we got to Dehli to be aware that we would probably experience some degree of culture shock and our senses would be completely overwhelmed.

So on the day that we are making our way to this Sufi festival in the heart of Dehli, our teacher organises for us to be driven into the city centre in the back of these three wheeled Rickshaw vehicles also called: Tuk-Tuks. There's one driver up front and then you've got room for 2 people in the back. There's a roof but no doors, so the sides of these vehicles are completely open. There are no seatbelts, or if there are I certainly didn't notice them because nobody wears them... so you're just clinging on to the sides of these things.

So we're on our way to this festival and driving through dense Dehli traffic and I am terrified. Cars are driving every which way, there are motorbikes and regular bikes, and there are people manually pulling carts full of spices and dried goods. Pedestrians are trying to cross the streets, there are no crosswalks or traffic lights. There are food stalls and chai tea stalls on the side of the road. There are shrines and offerings. Stray dogs and cats are weaving between cars, and there are cows just roaming the streets. Many of them have bells tied to their horns. I was so afraid that someone would run into a cow, but everyone just seemed to be unperturbed by them and just went around. Everyone is honking their horns, there is shouting in the streets... and the smells.... The beautiful aromas of tea and spices mixed with the smell of barn animals and cat urine... so many different smells. So I'm in the back of this Tuk Tuk with another woman next to me and watching people on bikes come straight for us. I think they're going to crash into us but at the last minute, they either swerve around us or slam on the brakes. And our driver is weaving

through, around, braking, speeding up, trying to get us to this festival in the heart of the city as quickly as possible. For me, it's all just so intense.

Then all of a sudden the woman next to me bursts into laughter... and she doesn't stop. Her laughter gets more and more hysterical until she is buckled over, tears are literally rolling down her face. Now I intuitively know that this laughter is a stress response, but laughter is contagious. So I start laughing. Before you know it we're both laughing our heads off, the driver is laughing at us laughing, and the tension in my body begins to release.

And then a feeling of peace overcomes me and I feel myself letting go. I am no longer clinging to the side of this Tuk Tuk for dear life, I am no longer trying to control what's going on *out there*. Rather, I sit back, and everything becomes so beautiful. I see everything around me not as chaos but as a divine dance playing out before me, unfolding in perfect harmony. At that moment, in the back of that Tuk-Tuk, in the heart of Dehli, I glimpse peace.

And for some reason, this experience reminds me of something Jesus said:

"Come to me, all you who 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."

Now you may or may not have an immediate experience that comes to mind that feels similar to my experience in Dehli, but every single one of us knows what it feels like to be in a place where we just feel completely overwhelmed. Where life just feels chaotic. Where our senses and our bodies are overloaded.

From the moment we wake up until the moment we go to bed, we are bombarded. Most of us carry these things called smartphones, with constant notifications, pings and emails to check and people to respond to. We're bombarded by marketing and advertising and consumerism that tells us to buy more, do more, be more. Take this pill and you will be healthy. Buy this product and you will be happy.

This is all happening subtly in the background, while each one of us is trying to figure out how to live a good life, which for many of us means managing the intense demands of our jobs so we can make a good living, but also feel purposeful. Many of us have families that we take care of. Some of us are students who are in a busy season of learning. Some of us are dealing with the difficult realities of health concerns. Some of us are having to deal with all of these things at once. We wear so many different hats and play so many different roles; parent, child, sibling, friend, colleague, spouse, grandparent... we're trying to do it all. But what if we can't do it all? What if we're not meant to do it all?

Jesus says: “*Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens*”. What does he mean by this? So, we can just give all our problems to Jesus, and expect to receive rest? What about our to-do lists? What about all of our responsibilities? Some of us have families who depend on us for their well-being. Some of us are immigrants who’ve come to a new country. We’re trying to find decent jobs and housing, which in this city can be a big challenge. Many of us are trying to learn a new language and a new culture. We can’t just come to Jesus and expect him to magically make all of our worries and stresses go away, can we?

Or perhaps, what makes these burdens so heavy on us, isn’t that we have responsibilities or things that we need to take care of. It’s that we’re trying to control things that are not in our control. What if we were to draw a line in the sand? On this side is everything we can control. Preparing for and going to the job interview. Taking care of our health. Showing up to our commitments, and our families to the best of our abilities, and recognizing that that is enough. But then there is everything that is not in our control. Whether we get the job, how life turns out, what people do *out there*... Perhaps this is what we give to Jesus. Perhaps letting go of this is what gives us rest.

But there’s also more. Jesus says: “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me*. He says: “*My yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.” What does Jesus mean when he says to take his yoke upon us? Now a yoke is a wooden frame that was traditionally fitted to a pair of oxen that pulls a cart behind them. Figuratively speaking we could say that we all carry yokes, Jesus included. Now we’ve just been talking about what makes our yoke so heavy and how letting go of what we cannot control, might lighten our load a little bit. But according to Jesus, his yoke is pretty light already. Huh.

Well, when I was doing my research on this passage, I discovered something very interesting. In the Jewish religion around Jesus’ time, when a pupil submitted themselves to the instruction of a certain religious teacher, it was often said that this pupil was “taking the yoke” of the teacher. Aha!

So Jesus is not telling us to take on his burdens here or to submit to him in a sort of constricting way. He's saying to come to him, with an open heart and open mind, ready to receive instruction. He’s saying: bring your heavy burdens, all the things you cannot control, all the things you need help with, and lay them here. I will take care of you. He’s also telling us to stop listening to all the noise from the outside world that is trying to tell us that we need to *be* somebody.

No, says Jesus. Give that all to me. Let me instruct you now. This is how Jesus gives us rest. He tells us what to do and he gives us the strength to do it, if only we make the space to listen. But if we’re too busy trying to be everything to everyone, trying to do everything and

control everything, clinging on so tightly the way I was on that Tuk Tuk, when things don't go a certain way... we can't hear what Jesus is trying to tell us.

So I'm not suggesting that we don't engage with the world at all, or that we don't have goals that we work towards. And I'm not saying even that we reduce our to-do list, throw our hands in the air, and say "Well you know, it's all out of my control anyway so I might as well not try. Jesus is going to take care of it". We've still got to show up and do our part, but what's not our part? That's what we give to Jesus. And you know, we might need to do that again and again and again. Some of us give our burdens to Jesus on Sunday, but then on Monday, we pick them right back up again. "Oh thank you Jesus for looking after my burden yesterday, you know, I think I'm good now. I can take it back."

We've got to leave it there. So we all, myself included, need to practice this regularly. Every time we have an anxious thought about something we cannot control, we need to make space for Jesus to enter there. To instruct us on how we can let it go, even if just for one moment.

Making space for Jesus to enter, doesn't need to be complex. It doesn't only need to happen at church on Sundays, or while you're praying. It can happen at any time. It can be as simple as setting an intention that God be present with you and through you, before an important meeting. It can be making space for 5 minutes of meditation or prayer, or keeping a gratitude journal. Maybe it means taking a short break from whatever you're doing mid-day to go for a walk, taking an intentional moment to admire how beautiful God's creation is. How about letting yourself laugh... allowing laughter to dissolve the clinging and controlling. Or even just pausing in the middle of whatever you're doing to just breathe. How many of us take the time to actually breathe? Full body deep breaths. In through the belly... letting the breath fill up the entire body, and as you exhale, breathing out all the tension, stress, worry, and things that you cannot control. Can you feel God's presence in the breath?... *Pause...* A moment of peace amid chaos. Sometimes all we need is one moment to make space for Jesus to instruct us.

The beautiful thing is that Jesus can talk to us anywhere and at any time. He was there with me in the back of the Tuk-Tuk on the busy streets of Dehli. He was whispering in my ear... let go. See the world through my eyes. Watch it all unfold like a perfectly imperfect divine dance.

He is instructing each one of us to put down our heavy burdens, to let go of the things we cannot control, and to stop listening to a world that tells us what we should do and who we should be... So, what will you do? How will you make more space for Jesus' instruction to enter every facet of your life?

Amen.