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It May Not Be What You Expect *Creative Encounters That Changed Things*

Matthew 11

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So we are in Part 2 of this series called *Creative Encounters That Changed Things*. We all walked in here this morning, whether we recognize it, know it, believe it or not, we are all longing for a deep and meaningful encounter with God. I don't know what your story holds as you come in these doors, but each and every one of us, in some way shape or form, whether or not we are in a season of struggle and doubt or a season of great opportunity and excitement and energy, we all long to hear from God. Yeah? And for even those of you who didn't agree, I still think deep in the bottom of all of us is this longing to hear from God. And so we're part of this series called *Creative Encounters That Change Things*, and we are looking at stories and ways that people encountered who God is and His message for them.

And today we're going to look in the book of Matthew and a story of Jesus and how He told of His coming kingdom and the ways in which the people were looking for God to show up—and how perhaps it just wasn't what they expected. Last week Tim took us through this beautiful story of Moses, and throughout all of Moses' story, God had been speaking to him. And then there's this moment with this bush and it's on fire, and God speaks to him and it's this profound moment! And Tim invites us to look into our own story and not miss the ways that God is speaking to us—in the themes of our own life—and not to miss these moments where God shows up and speaks so directly to us.

And so as we continue this discussion of *Creative Encounters*, I actually want to pause for just a moment and actually look at this definition of the word *creative* and let it shape a bit of our conversation today. So as we look at *Creative Encounters with God*, creative—according to the Oxford Dictionary—is the ability to create meaningful, new ideas and things done in an unusual way; (my wife would say I'm very creative according to that definition) or the ability to transcend traditional values, rules, relationships, and the like.

And I'm excited for whatever creativity God has for us today, because I believe that as we look at these stories of Jesus, it's going to take us to new places where we discover new ideas and things about the unusual ways that God works in our world, ways that transcend, perhaps, what we expect. And so as we open the Scriptures, would you join me in a quick word of prayer:

Father, as we come in here, we all carry all sorts of things. Some of us are struggling, doubting, wondering where You are in the midst of our lives, longing to hear a fresh word from You. Some of us have been traveling with You for years in our journey and You have been speaking to us so passionately along the way; and still in those moments, we still are here and we are expecting, and we long to encounter You. Like Mike was saying earlier, God, we just want our lives to be in such deep connection to You that it shapes everything for us. May, as we open these Scriptures, may You speak to us in a new and fresh way through the words of Jesus. In Your Son's name we pray, Amen.

So I invite you to turn with me to Matthew, Chapter 11. If you don't have a Bible, feel free to just listen along or maybe you have a phone with all those technological gadgets, but we are going to

Matthew, Chapter 11. We are going to work our way through this entire chapter; actually we will skip some parts; we will spend a lot more time in others, but we are going to work our way through the whole chapter. So starting in verse 1, Matthew chapter 11:

When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. (*NASB, Matthew 11:1)

So we know that Jesus was just spending time with His disciples. “This is this new kingdom. This is how I want you to go out into the world and tell this message. Take it; this is what you have; this is what you need. Now go forth and take this message forward.” He finishes that conversation with His disciples.

Now when John... In verse 2. So when John enters the scene...

Let’s pause there for one moment. What do we know about John? This is John the Baptist. This is the prophet that God had ordained to go before Jesus and declare that this new King is coming, and he would be the one to proclaim the way of this new King. And so John goes out into the wilderness dressed in camel’s hair (which I would just love to see that outfit), and he’s eating locusts and wild honey, and he’s out in this wilderness. And he starts proclaiming, and people come from all over the region because they’ve been waiting 400 years since God had spoken to them! And John ends that silence which had been prophesied—a new prophet would come, and he’d be like Elijah, and he would proclaim this new way of Jesus, and He would usher in this new kingdom. So John’s in the wilderness proclaiming it, and here comes Jesus. John baptizes Jesus, declares Him to be the One, and when Jesus comes out of the waters, the heavens break open and the Spirit descends upon Jesus, and God says, “This is the One.” And John witnesses the entire thing, and because of John’s allegiance to Jesus, we find that John has now landed himself in prison—a tough road for John! So, verse 2:

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" (Vs. 2-3)

So hold on for a minute! John, the one who was just with Jesus, proclaiming this Messiah’s coming, baptizes Him, sees the heavens break open, God declares Him the One—John’s there, and suddenly he’s starts to hear these stories of who Jesus is and what Jesus is up to and John finds himself in the middle of this moment of doubt. **“Jesus, are You really the One or should we look for someone else?”** You see John thought that when Jesus showed up it would look like this. It would look like this King who would maybe come in on a chariot and take things by storm and rule and be over all of the people then and there. And yet Jesus comes up and He starts healing people; He starts doing these things, and John hears these stories, and John’s like, “Are you sure?” So he sends people on this trek to go find out, “Is this really the One; am I really giving my life for this? And is this really *it*? Cause if it’s *it*, I’m in, but if it’s not, boy we could have saved a lot of heartache ‘cause here I’m sitting in prison, and this could be a whole different story.” And yet how does Jesus meet John in his doubt and in his questions? Verse 4:

Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: *the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.*” (Vs. 4-6)

How does Jesus respond to John's doubt? He steps right into it with him and He says, "Yes, John, I am indeed the One." He doesn't rebuke him; He doesn't chastise him. He doesn't tell him that he is stupid or that he's wrong or that he's asking the wrong questions or that he's lost his way. No, Jesus steps right into John's doubt and He's with him and He says, "Yes, John, I *am* the One, and blessed are you who doesn't take offense at this new thing that I'm up to."

I don't know about you, but perhaps you've come here this morning and you are in a season of doubt and struggle. Maybe your questions are about your own faith or where God is at in the midst of your journey. Maybe you're looking around and you just don't believe anymore that God can provide or that He can show up or that He really can speak to you or that it's all really true. Let me tell you that Jesus shows up and He meets us right in the middle of that doubt. You can see it all throughout the history of, even our own faith. Great leaders of the last two hundred years who write about it: C.S. Lewis, John Calvin, Martin Luther, even in Scriptures—doubting Thomas. Right? We know these stories. People who doubt and struggle and wonder whether or not it's real—and Jesus meets them right in the middle of their doubt.

In my own life there was this season about eight or nine years ago. My wife and I were living in Seattle and we had just been launching this *Harbor Ministry*—Tim Bohlke, myself, and one other guy had started this new ministry. It was all around the country and we were in Seattle, and Tim was here and we had already launched our first couple of groups, and things had gone really well. And we had seen God do all these incredible things, and He used *us* to do it—which was weird. But this beautiful thing had emerged, and right smack dab in the middle of us seeing what God was up to, I found myself in this season of struggle and doubt—where my own story and the struggle and the wounds that I had carried with me combined with new questions, new wrestlings of how science sort of intermixes with what the text says, and new ways that I encountered post-modern questions that critiqued our faith. And suddenly I was holding these questions that I didn't have total answers to, and my own struggle with what I had experienced—the hypocrisy and the legalism that I had grown up with. Suddenly I was in the middle of this moment, and I sat down with Tim at Culvers—right down the road, just so you can picture it, like those cute little booths—and we sat there and I just said, "I don't know that I can keep going—like I don't know that I buy this anymore—and I don't know whether or not I can really believe this." And in that moment Tim didn't chastise me; he didn't rebuke me. He didn't tell me my questions were invalid. No, he stepped right into that moment and he said, "Just keep asking those questions."

The doubt is all part of the journey; it is all part of the process. Keep going. Don't stop. Keep asking the questions. Keep wrestling. If God is really true, He will meet you there! So on the plane ride home, I opened up a journal and I grabbed my Bible and I made a deal with myself and with God. I'll read through the Gospels one more time, and I had one rule: any question, any doubt, any struggle—total, fair game—and I just wrote them out in this journal, and as I started working my way through the Scriptures, I very quickly actually landed on this passage and it started to change things for me. It started to uproot a lot of what I thought was true about who Jesus was. Suddenly I'm starting to realize: that's not who Jesus is at all. And suddenly the questions that I've had about my faith, I've started to find this deep, meaningful answer to and the adventure of what it looks like to have a relationship with God. Right in the middle of my own doubt, God enters in with me, a friend enters with me and says, "The doubts, the questions, it's all worth it. It's all a part of the journey. Keep wrestling. Keep struggling!"

You see I had expected in my faith journey to have it all together. Right? As Christians, we're supposed to know all the answers. We aren't supposed to struggle. We are supposed to clean ourselves up, show up on Sunday morning, have it all put together nice and neat and tidy. But

that's just not our experience of life so often is it? I don't know what doubts, what questions, what struggles you have as you come here this morning, but I know that whatever they are, Jesus welcomes them, and He meets us and encounters us in ways we never expected, even in the midst of our struggle. The story continues in verse 7:

As these men (John's disciples) were going away (to go and report back to John), Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in *soft clothing*? Those who wear *soft clothing* are in kings' palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written,

'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,

WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! (Vs. 7-11a)

Jesus speaks to the crowd about who this John is and He starts to turn the conversation into this question, "Who did you expect to see when you went out to see this prophet? You expected to see someone dressed in nice and soft clothing, like coming from some king's palace...a reed shaken in the wind...someone that would just come and go? No, no, no, you see, I'm up to something different. This John is not only a prophet, but the greatest of all prophets." He speaks about John—the one who was just doubting, just struggling—as the greatest prophet that had ever been born. You see, that doubt didn't discount who John was and what John was called to do. And in the middle of that, Jesus starts to unravel this story about how sometimes we expect these things, but maybe, "I'm up to something new and it looks different than you expect." And He goes on, second half of verse 11:

...yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than even he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Vs. 11b-15)

Jesus takes them into this moment. You expected this prophet to look a certain way and you expected this arrival of this King to be done in a certain fashion, but let me tell you, "I'm up to something new." And He has this moment with the crowd where He says, "Not only was John the greatest of all the prophets," but He starts to proclaim what this new kingdom is like, "*And the least of you are even greater than he.*" He took their entire expectation and understanding of the kingdom and He flipped it upside down.

I imagine this moment if I'm a Hebrew person, I'm listening to this conversation with Jesus and He says, "*The least of you,*" not the most religious, not the ones who have it all figured out, "The least of you is greater than he." It's like that conversation at Thanksgiving dinner when your aunt speaks up and she's like, "She never should have married him!" And everybody is like, "Ohhh...what...what...no...that's not...you can't say...that's not at all what we thought it would..." Right, like these people, this message was not what they were expecting! They expected a king to come in with a sword, like had been done through David and Solomon, and that the kingdom would be taken with force. And Jesus goes on to say, "You saw that." Until now this kingdom of heaven has suffered great violence, but let me tell you that really the way that's coming—this new kingdom that I'm here to usher in—it's not one of power and of violence, but it's one that is given to *the least of you*.

It's about mercy and love and grace and kindness and forgiveness. It's never been about power. "And those of you that have ears to hear—that I'm up to something totally new—let you hear it." And it's this incredible invitation into something that is totally unexpected.

And again for all of us, there are times in our lives, right, where we hoped God would show up in a certain way, and perhaps I just need Him to provide financially for this situation. But in turn what we didn't actually need was any money; what we needed was to learn to trust that God is good and He will provide for us. Or that maybe there is a broken relationship and if you are just longing for healing for that person to come back into the fold, but really what God was up to was working on your own heart. So often we think God should show up in a certain way, and yet when He does, it's in a way we didn't expect or see coming.

There was a season in our own life. We were living in Seattle and things were good. We loved it there. If you've never been, it's the most beautiful place on earth, next to Lincoln, Nebraska, of course. But it's like *up there*! Anyway, we loved it! My wife had a great job she loved. I had started a business that was thriving. I was doing ministry nationally and it was just a fantastic season, and we just thought this is where God has us. We had found a church family that we belonged to. It was just one of those seasons that was good. And we decided we were going to start our family there. So let's get a house—right, like total American dream—like buy the house, have the baby... So we started walking down that road and we decided we were going to buy a house and it was the day we were signing our papers, and I walked into the loan officer's room, and I was early, which never happens. So this story was just weird from the start. And I sat down and I was waiting for Whitney to come, and I was waiting for our loan officer to bring the papers, and just tons of energy and excitement. And I get this phone call; and apparently it's Tim Bohlke's storied day. Tim had called me, and he was on the other end, and he's like, "Hey, what's going on?" "Oh, we are just signing papers." "Oh, I forgot that's today. Cool. Congrats. Hey, um, I just want you to consider...I know that you know this job opened up, but do you think you guys would want to take this job back in Lincoln?"

"What?" And I literally laugh at him, like ha, ha, funny joke! And we had a laugh. And he's like, "You're buying a house but, seriously, I want you to consider this job." And so Whitney comes into the room and says, "Hey, how is your day?" And I say, "Good, Tim just called and offered us a job in Lincoln!" And she's like (laughing), "Yea, Tim would do that; that's funny."

Eleven months later, we were here. Our house was bought, sold, and we were here. We thought God was up to something in our lives. We thought this is what He had for us; suddenly He's up to something totally new, something totally different. We didn't see that coming. And I've got to say that when you can step into those moments where God is up to something totally new, it can change everything, and for us, I don't know where we would be had we not packed up and moved here. I mean our life would be in such a different place, and I'm so thankful for the journey that God has had for on.

Where in your life are you hoping and expecting that God shows up in one way? Perhaps He's inviting you and me to open our hearts and our hands and our ears to whatever it is that He may be doing because it may not be what we would expect. This story makes another interesting turn. As Jesus, proclaiming this new message, speaks to this crowd that is gathered, verse 16:

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other *children*, and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge (a dirge is like a song of lament you'd

hear at a funeral), **and you did not mourn.'** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." (Vs. 16-19)

Jesus to this crowd says, "What did you go out in the wilderness to see? Someone dressed in soft clothes, someone that looked like this earthly king? No, it's not what I was up to. And here I am coming to bring this new message about the least of these." And then He goes on to give this description, this metaphoric picture of how these people totally had missed what God was up to. And He says, "You're like these children who play in the street and they dance and they sing, and you would not dance with them." Or then, "They mourn and they grieve and they lament, and you're not present with them as they do that either." You see, "I am up to something totally new and I'm here to tell you what it is, and you've totally missed it." They've missed it so far that He goes on to say how they described John as a demon-possessed man, and they say of Jesus that he is a drunk and a glutton, because He came eating and drinking and spent time with the *least of these*. See, they had expected it to come a certain way and this King would look like something that they had thought of for years, and yet Jesus shows up on the scene eating and drinking with the least and they look to Him and they totally miss what He's really up to.

Now this brings a really interesting conversation that I think is so timely for us because Jesus actually starts out this paragraph by saying, "**To what shall I compare this generation?**" He looks out at all of them and he says "I'm up to something new and you expected it to look like this, but it looks like this." And as a *Twenty Somethings* pastor here, on the edge of like the Millennial generation, I find most days I stand in the middle of a very interesting conversation.

An older generation looking at a younger generation and sometimes, maybe often saying, "They just don't get it—like morally, or politically, stylistically, like the way they encounter and see God. It's just not the way we do, and I'm just afraid they're not going to understand what it really looks like or really should look like, and they're just crazy off in their new directions! And I'm worried about them." And on the other side, there's this younger generation looking to this older generation. It's like, "You're so old and boring; you're close-minded..." And I stand in the middle of this conversation, sort of going like, "We're all missing it because the Spirit is always up to something new around us." Right? Like the Spirit is always doing a new work.

Jesus, just a few chapters earlier, describes what He's up to as wine and wine skins. And He says, "You don't take new wine and put it in an old wine skin. You don't take something new that's been created with care and love, that's been nurtured and grown, and put it in something that's old and brittle and dried up, something that's been around for awhile. No, no, you put it in new wine skins. I'm always up to something new and it may not be what you expect, but let Me tell you that I'm in it."

And so for those of us that are older, when we look, perhaps at this younger generation, may we not see them with suspect, but may we open up our ears to hear what God may be doing in beautiful and new ways. And it may look so very different from what you would hope or what has been meaningful to you. It may look like new theology or new language or new style or new ways of gathering or new questions, but let me tell you that God has this generation, and as one of them—like there are many of us who are so passionately pursuing who Jesus is, and yes, it may look different, and things may need to change in the years and months ahead, but I'm telling you that God has us and there are beautiful things that are happening among us, and we believe so

passionately that we want to see this kingdom come here and now—and for this world to be transformed.

And perhaps more importantly for me to say to those of you who are younger: God is and has been up to so many beautiful things in the lives of those who have gone before us. We can be so cynical and so egotistical to think that the way we see it is way better, way more relevant—new, cool, hip, trendy, whatever, authentic—but I can honestly say that in my life, if it were not for those who have gone before me, I don't know where I would be. I would not understand grace the way that I do. I would not have an integrated, holistic faith that touches every part of my life—my hobbies, my work, my relationships, my family. I wouldn't have a community of people like this.

This place wouldn't exist if it weren't for this generation who didn't miss it, but knew that God was up to something new, and so they risked everything to build a place where we could come together, where we could worship, where we could wrestle through Scripture together. If it weren't for the thousands of lives who've sacrificed time and talent and treasure, we wouldn't see a church-planting movement all throughout India and the world. God has been up to so many new and beautiful things in the generation that has gone before us. May we not miss it! May we not just lead! And there are statistics all day long. Every day there's a new book, a new article that comes out about how Millennials are leading the church and how their faith is looking so different. May we not lead just because we believe God is up to something new, but may we open our hands and our ears and our hearts to know that God has been and is a part of those who have gone before us and we have much to learn from them, as much as they have to learn from us.

You see Jesus' invitation in this moment is that none of us, no matter what generation we are a part of, would miss what He's up to in our world, and sometimes we hope and expect it to look like one thing, and suddenly He's up to a new thing; and change is hard. I know that first hand. It can often be so difficult when things that you thought would play out one way, start to play out another. And yet God meets us right in the middle of all the new things that He is up to, and He guides us through it.

You see, we're people of Berea. Our name Lincoln Berean, it comes out of this chapter in the book of Acts, Acts 17. And the story is these people were in Berea, and Paul comes preaching. And he's declaring this new kingdom, this kingdom he had learned about from Jesus. And it's not what the people of Berea had expected. See, they had been reading Scriptures and they expected it to look like this King who would rule and rescue them from Herod, and it would look like this violent thing would take over, and the world would be ruled by Jesus. And yet Paul comes preaching a different gospel, the one that Jesus brings, the one that God had intended for all the time, and he commends the people of Berea. Why? Because they took this new, fresh world that God was up to, and they took it to the Scriptures, and they looked and they poured over it, and suddenly they realized what God had been saying He was going to do; it looked different than what they thought. But you know what? "We're in. This new thing that God is up to—we're in." And Paul commends them because they didn't just shut it down, and they didn't just take his word for it either. But they went to the Scriptures and they said, "God, what are You up to? And can we join You?"

That's who we are. We are those people who are open to whatever it is that God is up to in our lives and in our community, and in our church family. And it may be hard and different and difficult, yet we are the kind of people, when we proclaim it through our name as Lincoln Berean, we will be the kind of people who will walk open-handedly into places where we thought God might show up like this, but it turns out He is up to something totally new, something totally different. And whether that be generationally or racially or politically or economically, may you

open your hands; may we, may I, may we open our hands and our ears and our hearts to see whatever it is that God has to teach us—even from some of the most unlikely and unexpected places because I believe that when we do that, we receive what we need from God and He meets us right there. And what He’s up to, that’s what we long to join and be a part of. I didn’t see it coming—that we would be back here—and yet when you step in and say “yes” to whatever it is that God is up to, beautiful things happen.

Jesus goes on, and I’m actually going to let you read this later; but in verses 20-24, so passionately and honestly—in some ways this is a difficult passage to read because Jesus goes on to rebuke, to denounce these cities in which He had been preaching, and that they did not repent. They didn’t turn towards this new thing that He was about. Instead they stayed in the ways that *they* thought it should look like. Jesus goes on to denounce those cities using really, really poignant and harsh words. He’s that passionate about us joining in His movement and not just doing it the way we think it should be done. In verse 25—let’s pick up there:

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*." (Vs. 25-27)

Jesus pauses and He says, “I praise my Father because He just didn’t give this new message, this new thing, this new kingdom to those who thought they had it all figured out—to the religious elites, to the ones with all the answers. No, He gave it to infants and I praise Him for it, because it’s in the right hands.” And He goes on to say that, “This mystery has been so big and so unlikely and so unexpected that, until now, Myself and the Father, we are the only Ones who actually understood it. But here I am to reveal it to you—this new kingdom, this new life, this new way. It’s for you. It’s for Me.” And He comes to invite us into it. And He ends this conversation with the crowd by offering all of them a glimpse of just what this kingdom life, what His new kingly reign would look like. Verse 28:

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, 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.”
(Vs. 28-30)

Jesus, to this crowd of doubters—of the least of these, of the ones who had been spending their entire lives trying to do it all on their own and to be as religious as they can to earn God’s favor—he says to all of them, “**Come...take My yoke upon you.**” Now one thing to note that’s really helpful in understanding this passage is: the Hebrew people would have likely heard this word **yoke** in two separate ways. The first: All Hebrew good boys and girls would spend their early years memorizing the Torah, memorizing the first five books of the Bible. There are hundreds of laws and commandments inside of them. And as you would do that, you would follow a Rabbi, and that Rabbi would give you their **yoke**, their *understanding*, their *interpretations* of those laws, of exactly what it meant to follow them. So there were all these nuances and subtleties that you would take on as you followed a specific Rabbi. So as these people heard this word **yoke** and see as Jesus said, “**Take My yoke upon you,**” they would have heard it as this heavy, religious, big, giant thing that they had to memorize and get deep in their bones. And as someone who doesn’t memorize things

very well and did very, very below kind of average in school, I would have heard that and would have been like, “No thank you.”

The other way they would probably have heard it: In the book of Isaiah, one of the prophets used to describe when the Hebrew people were in slavery, they called it the *yoke of their oppressor*. As they were in slavery, they described that oppressor’s rod—that rule and reign that was over them—as the *yoke of their oppressor*, this heavy slavery, unjust way of living in the world. They would have heard this word **yoke** with such an interesting perspective—one of heaviness, one of struggle, one of great religion, of a lot of work. And yet Jesus comes and He says, **“Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden—those of you tired from religion, those of you who are the least, those of you doubters—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.”**

I want to share this passage one more time, this time through the Message translation. This has come to mean a lot to me and I love how Eugene Petersen translates this:

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly. (Vs. 28-30, MSG)

To the very people that Jesus just said, “You missed it,” He invites them to come and take a different yoke upon them. He invites them to come and experience this new kingdom that He was here to bring forth—not one of violence and of religion, but one of freedom and of love and of forgiveness and grace. No matter where you come from this morning, may you encounter God in such a way you didn’t expect. So often we expect God to show up like *this* but He shows up in such a different way and in this moment and in these Scriptures we see Jesus inviting these people into a whole new reality and a whole new kingdom. That is the message of Jesus! That is this adventurous life that He invites you and me into, and it’s the message that He invites us to encounter day in and day out as we pursue Him in ways we didn’t expect.

So whether you’re here and you’re doubting and you’re struggling and you don’t know that you even buy this or whether or not that God will show up, let me tell you that Jesus meets us here and He says, “Learn My way and I’m telling you I will provide for you, for what you need.” Or those of you who just feel like you have no place of belonging in this world, Jesus shows up and He says, “Come with Me and I’ll show you what your soul has really been longing for. And He invites those of us who have just struggled—maybe it’s generationally to connect with God in a new and fresh ways. Maybe it’s just that we carried around legalism for so long, and Jesus invites us to let down this heavy-laden version of our lives, and to pick up the one He has always intended for us.

Our hope: may we be as we pursue to encounter God in deep and meaningful ways, may we not miss the moments and the way in which God has been speaking to us in our lives; and the moments He shows up and speaks so poignantly to us, may we not miss those moments. And when He shows up and speaks to us in a way we didn’t expect, a way we didn’t see coming, may we open our hands and hearts, and may we have ears to hear whatever it is that He has for us, that we truly might follow Him in a way that is easy and light and is rest for our souls.

Father, thank You that You meet each one of us individually. Whatever it is that we carried with us, whatever it is that our stories have amounted to in this moment, God, You meet us right here. May we not miss these moments here, this afternoon, in the hours and days to come. God, may we create a rhythm in our life where we can connect and encounter You in meaningful ways. And when You speak, may we be listening. As we go from here, God, give us the courage to follow Your Spirit, Your Holy Wind, whichever direction it blows, may we follow You, and may we trust that Your way is far greater than ours ever could, even if it looks nothing like what we expected. Thank You for these friends that I can wrestle through life with, that we can share our stories together, that we can look at Scriptures honestly and authentically to find what it is that You are up to. May You continue to encourage us individually and as a community, that we might continue to pursue whatever it is You're calling us to. In Your Son's name we pray, Amen.

I just want to invite you as well, that as you go from here, to fight for these encounters with God, to open yourself up to whatever it is that God might have for you. And sometimes, if you're like me, you can get stuck in a rut of what it looks like to connect with God, or reading Scripture or prayer, so actually we've got a little pamphlet, a little field guide as I like to call it, and you can grab it on your way out, and you can even keep it in your back pocket all week long. But there is just a little guide and every day it invites you to encounter God in a new and a fresh way. It invites you to encounter Him in ways maybe you didn't expect or didn't see. And for those of you who weren't able to get one last week, there's actually some from last week's series as well. And we're inviting you into 21 days of just trying God in new and fresh ways, because we believe that if we can encounter Him, it can change everything for us. Amen?

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
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