When I returned from the beach where I spent time I spent with my family (and Hurricane Arthur!) there was a stack of mail awaiting me. Many were birthday cards, but two were invitations. Often, at the bottom of the invitation, next to a phone number or e-mail address, are the four capital letters R.S.V.P. for the French phrase “respondez s’il vous plait” meaning “Please reply.” When you see those four letters, you know what the rules of etiquette require you to do… let the host/ess know you plan to attend.

Today’s Gospel has just such an invitation with an R.S.V.P. invisibly written at the end. The Lord’s Galilean ministry is taking its toll on him and the 12 disciples. Crowds follow Jesus from town to town, hillside to hillside. They hang on his every word. Their mouths have tasted bread and fish multiplied from a small boy’s lunch bag. Jesus has cleansed lepers, restored sight to the blind, raised the dead, and set the religious leaders on notice that God’s Word has more to do with
Something else has happened just before today’s passage. John the Baptist, the bold and rough desert prophet, is in prison. John, who baptized our Lord declaring him “God’s anointed”, will soon lose his head at Herod’s command. Then the unexpected happens: some cities outright reject our Lord’s message even though they witnessed his life-giving power. Jesus looked into the eyes of those who followed him and saw weariness riveted in their brows and exhaustion creasing their cheeks. To them, and to us, he extended this exquisite invitation:

Come to me, all you that 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 of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Can you still your hearts enough to hear this invitation and make it your own? Do you sense at the very end that unspoken but present
R.S.V.P. inviting a response? If you do, what could such a response mean in your journey following Jesus Christ?

For one thing, it could mean for the first time or perhaps the 100th time, you deeply and genuinely hear our Lord inviting you to come to him. Someone has said the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is an *invitational gift*. The only way we fully experience God’s grace, see God’s presence, and live in God’s promise is responding to God’s invitation. We don’t see in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ a pushy Savior or demanding Master. With gentleness and utter humility, Jesus of Nazareth walks the lanes of our routines with outstretched hands, inviting us to a relationship with him.

All four gospels tell stories about our Lord’s presence at meals. Often, someone like Matthew or Zacchaeus invites him to their home for dinner. What I find fascinating in all these “meal stories” is how the *invitee* becomes the *inviter*. Jesus is guest at Zacchaeus’ home but soon becomes the one who invites the tax collector to an entirely new way of
life. And when Zacchaeus says “Yes”, our Lord celebrates the salvation that comes to that home. We too will discover in our own experience the full joy of our faith when we say “Yes” to our Lord’s invitation to come to him.

Hearing the invitation, however, requires a confession. Though hard for us to do, we must admit our love of carrying heavy burdens and the weariness that follows. Why is it we take so much pride in reporting to others how busy we are? A friend asks, “How are you doing today?” and we respond with a sigh, “I’m just running from one emergency to the next!” Our reporting of weariness carries with it a tinge of pride as if running from here to there, this event to the next, a demanding job to a thankless volunteer commitment somehow makes us important – at least in our own eyes.

It is not without thought that each time we gather for worship, we confess our sins to God and one another, seeking the forgiveness only given by the One who gave his life for us. The next time we come to
that moment in worship, our souls might be well served if we
individually and collectively confessed our love of crowded schedules
and our reluctance to give them up!

Jesus offers us another way. Jesus invites us to come to him and
confess only to him that we are not the masters of our destiny or the
makers of ultimate meaning. Instead, with confession on our lips, we
admit to God, to ourselves, and to others that lasting joy, deeply
satisfying work, and genuine rest for soul and body are gifts that our
God gives.

Then, when we stand before the Master having confessed our
controlling, burden-carrying, weary ways, we receive the yoke he gives.
“Take my yoke upon you,” he says, “and learn from me. For my yoke is
easy and my burden is light.” In ancient times, a pair of oxen were
yoked together to plow a field or drag heavy loads. Both oxen, no
matter how stubborn and independent one (or both!) might be, they had
to walk together because of the yoke.
When we say “R.S.V.P.” to our Lord’s invitation, we choose to place the neck of our lives in the Master’s yoke, tying our life to his and his way to ours. Being yoked with Christ leads us to learning his way, his values, his attitudes, going where he goes and becoming all he longs for us to be. We learn from him, become like him because we are yoked to him.

This yoking-learning reality is at the heart of the Christian journey. Yet we resist it still thinking we know best. When we choose selfishness over generosity, we cast off our Lord’s yoke. When holding on to perceived wrongs others have inflicted on us instead of seeing the wrongs we have dealt out to others, we are left alone, unyoked to Christ and devoid of the gift of grace. We resist his gentleness and lowliness of heart for our strength and high-minded ways.

Just now, imagine an envelope in your hands. Hold our Lord’s invitation and open it with care. Read his invitation to come to him with
all your burdens and weariness, and then look at the bottom left corner. There you will see his R.S.V.P. In faith today, choosing his yoke over yours, say “Yes”, and enter even more fully into the joy of following Jesus Christ.