



July 21, 2025

Unexpected Gifts

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest"

-Jesus' words written in Matthew 11:28

I know you are tired

Come

This is the way.

-Rumi

13th-century Persian poet and mystic

About a month ago I received a pretty sweatshirt in the mail. I didn't know who had sent it. It was addressed to "Barbie," the name my family of origin uses for me. Everyone I asked denied having sent it. It wasn't my birthday. I couldn't figure out who had sent this gift to me.

We all receive gifts from time to time. Some are obviously gifts, others may look nothing like a gift at the time, but in hindsight, it is clear.

In the middle of one summer long ago, I ruptured my Achilles tendon on the tennis court. It was a very busy summer for me. I was in the middle of rehearsals for a children's show I was directing. My two kids were little, 5 and 8. So I had to stop. I had to sit down, lie down, stop moving around so much. I had to receive the gift of rest.

In that time of rest, I figured out a new path for myself, which led to many years as a school librarian, a wonderful career for me. An unexpected gift.

And now, as I age, I find that I don't want to slow down, but sometimes I must. Resting is more necessary than it used to be.

I'm sure many of you have full summers like I do, with family and friends and fun

outdoor activities that we long for in the winter. Let's not forget to rest. Let's receive the gift of rest that Jesus offered to us. Rest for the soul. When I read Rumi's little poem above, I felt instantly seen in my need to be still.

I did solve the mystery of the sweatshirt. It came as an unexpected thank you gift. For that I am grateful. I am also grateful for the reminder from a Sufi mystic and Jesus, that rest is a divine gift to be received and embraced.

Eugene Peterson's translation of the Matthew passage means a lot to me. Let it be my gift to you on this summer day:

*Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out by 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.*

~Written by Barb Perry

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