

## The Right Tempo (Matthew 11:25-30)

*Rev. Jeff Rainwater, Hope United Methodist Church  
The First Sunday in Lent: February 22, 2026*

### Winter Olympics: It's All About Rhythm & Tempo

Oh, y'all... I'm on sports overload... IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE! First of all, that Duke basketball game last night! Don't worry; I won't brag... too much. And after two wonderful weeks of the Winter Olympics. Not all the teams and individuals I was rooting for won. I feel bad for 'Quad God' Ilia Malinin, and I'm grieving that once again the USA Ladies are without a curling medal. But I love hearing the stories of these amazing individuals – all of them – who achieved so much just to reach that stage.

The talent, the skill, the sacrifice, the perseverance – it is all praiseworthy to me. Maybe I was thinking about this sermon series as I watched, but I began noticing something new. Not only does it take amazing abilities – speed for some, strength for most, focus for all – but in many sports it takes an incredible sense of rhythm and tempo. Shiffrin pivoting around those poles was as much dance as race. Snowboarders flipping insanely in the air and knowing exactly when to stop and find the ground. Even the biathletes finding the tempo to breathe or hold their breath. In almost every sport, every athlete had to discover the right tempo to succeed.

### Easy?... I Don't Think So!

You may be wondering what that has to do with Jesus' words for today. Let's dive in. These are words most of us have heard:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me... For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."(Matthew 11:28-30 excerpts)*

Sounds nice, right? Who wouldn't want that, especially with schedules so full of work, family, and obligations — some placed upon us and others we pile on ourselves? On Ash Wednesday, Pastor Haeil spoke about the cult of busyness we often join. A little "easy" would be nice. If only it were that easy to let go of busy, stress, expectations, worry, doubt, even fear.

But I'm not sure there is anything easy about following Jesus. Nothing easy about practicing love. Hate is easier — just let fear lead. Nothing easy about serving others when every commercial says life is about 'me.' Nothing easy about seeking justice or praying for our enemies. Are we sure what Jesus offers is easy?

Here's something that may be good news or bad news – I'll let you decide.

Jesus never promises "easy."

"What? But Pastor Jeff... that's what was on the screen, what Lisa read, what my Bible says at home!"

We have to remember Jesus didn't speak English. He spoke Aramaic, translated into Greek, then much later into English. When we look at the Greek, the word translated "easy" is *crestos*. A better translation is "kind." An even better one, in the context of yoking animals, is "well fitting."

An ill-fitting yoke will wound an ox even with a light load. But even a heavy burden is bearable if the yoke fits.

What Jesus is saying is that, unlike other yokes, his fits. Not one size fits all. It fits you. Like it was made just for you. Which it was.

### **Alysa Liu: Finding The Right Fit. Finding The Right Tempo.**

There's this illusion of the Olympics, and professional athletes in general, that we love: They make it look easy. And one in particular this year: figure skater and gold medalist Alysa Liu. Watching her, you would think she didn't have a care in the world, stepping onto the biggest stage in her sport. On the ice, she was light and free — like she could fly.

And all it took was walking away for a couple of years. After early success (at 13!), she retired at 16. She got a driver's license, took a vacation, made friends, started college... and realized she was more than her skating. She found the yoke that fit because it was made for her.

I don't think I can say it better than she can, so watch this:

[Link to Facebook Reel video. May require Facebook account.](#)

She found what fit. She found the right tempo and rhythm — not just in skating, but in her life. The tempo that brings joy. She found her vocation, her passion, her calling. She calls it her Art.

*“It’s not about the medals. It’s about my Art.”(Alysa Liu)*

Oh how I love that! Of course that doesn’t mean she didn’t practice, work hard, and sacrifice like every other athlete. But her burden became lighter because she found the right fit and the right tempo for her life.

## **Come To Me**

What is your Art — the calling of your life? And what is the right tempo? I can’t name that for you. But I can suggest a few practices.

First, explore what you love for the sheer joy of doing it, then ask, “How might this bless another?” Art is good for the person. It is even better when shared.

Next is the art of *rest* — even from what you love. Rest so you can discover... you. We call it Sabbath. Not a diversion from one task to another. Rest. Stillness. We will sing about it all Lent: come and find the quiet center.

And while you’re resting, pray. For some, prayer feels hard, as if there were only one right way — as if it were a one-size-fits-all world again. I think there may be as many ways to pray as there are people, because there is a yoke made just for you. And one more...

In ancient Israel, as in early America and parts of the developing world today, a plow yoke fits two oxen. When Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you,” he offers you the other half, so you work together.

Sometimes that yoke is less about the work and more about the relationship. Come to me. Take my yoke. Learn from me. Yes, it’s about pulling the till, but it’s also about being near the One who made the yoke that fits — and the One through whom we were made.

Alysa Liu became a gold medalist by finding her tempo, her rhythm, her Art. None of us here is perhaps called to be a figure skater. But we are called to follow this One named Jesus, who loved those others did not, who forgave sinners like us, who strove for justice, who knew

*The Right Tempo (Hope UMC Message | February 22, 2026)*

what it was to sacrifice. This life is not easy. But it can be full of joy, for Jesus walks with us still.

“You have made us for Yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”