Introduction:

There is an expression that musicians sometimes use. It is “in the groove.”
After a performance you might hear them say, “We were really in a groove today,”
Or sometimes, “we just couldn’t get a groove on that.”
What they are referring to is their sense of togetherness.
When the rhythm is tight, when every performer is exactly together, it’s “in the groove.”
When it’s not tight, when togetherness isn’t there, it’s not.

There’s something of the same idea in the bible reading this morning. Jesus uses the image of music to talk about how he and the people are not together. He says their situation is like children teasing each other, “We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn.”
He and they are not in the groove.

So, today, as we have a special jazz service, I want us to look at this text. What does it mean to be singing the same tune as Jesus? How is it we get in synch with him? What does it mean to be in the groove?

1. There’s a rhythm to life with Jesus.
It is not the same old thing day after day after day.
There’s ebb and flow, intensification and relaxation.

You look at what the bible shows.
Just flip through the rest of Matthew and what do you see?
Sometimes Jesus is mobbed by crowds; other times he’s gone somewhere quiet all alone.
Sometimes he’s facing down his opponents; other times he’s kicking back at a party.
Sometimes he’s trudging from town to town; other times he’s teaching in one place.
There’s a rhythm there, a sense of flex.

It’s not very different when we think of our life as a church seeking to follow Jesus. It also has a rhythm.
Sometimes we’re gearing up for a new venture, fall Sunday school, a Christmas program;
Other times we’re letting go, celebrating what we’ve achieved.
Sometimes we’re focused on the outside, on who we can help and how;
Other times on the inside, on people we know and love.
Sometimes we’re full of activity as we move tables or wash windows;
Other times we are consumed by our connection with God as we lift our voices in song.
The job I had before I went into ministry was in a retail store. I was very glad of the money I made there, but it did have a downside. It was b-o-r-i-n-g!

Every day was the same relentless routine of repetitive actions. Some time after I’d been in ministry I talked with one of my former co-workers. He wanted to know how it was going. I don’t remember all I told him but I do remember the very first thing I said: “it sure isn’t boring!”

So much of modern life ends up resembling the assembly-line. Its do, do, do; repeat, repeat, repeat; again, again, again. What Jesus shows us is that the assembly line wasn’t God’s idea for our lives at all. God’s intention wasn’t that our lives just keep doing the same old thing over and over. God doesn’t want us doing nothing but the same old thing of action, action, action or inaction, inaction, inaction. God’s intention is for there to be an ebb and flow, times of intensification and times of relaxation. To get in the groove means getting off the treadmill of sameness. It means recognizing there’s a rhythm to life with Jesus.

2. **Rhythmic variety gives energy.**
Having relaxed times helps us get ready for intense times. Active, busy times help us appreciate down times.

Just imagine if every song had exactly the same rhythm and speed. What if all of them went duh, duh, duh, duh, duh...[all quarter notes]. Wouldn’t it be dull? There’d be nothing at all worth listening to music for. But even the simplest song has some rhythmic variety. You take “Jesus loves me this I know.” It’s hard to find a tune that is more basic than that. In the opening phrase the notes are all even until we get to the word “know.” It is the only change. But do you hear what happens when you land on that word? The song gathers energy. That one slight pause helps us get ready for the next series of equal notes. Even the slight variety it possesses turns out to give energy.

I don’t know if you’ve ever considered worship from a purely functional viewpoint. But if you do, it’s significant how “useless” worship appears to be. Sure you might get something out of the sermon, you might hear a song that moves you but really it doesn’t achieve much does it? There’s not much measurable that you can see coming out of it. It’s not like building a house for homeless people or organizing a class for new parents. So why then is it the number one activity of the church?
The answer comes in a conversation I once had with a woman. She was along enough in years that she was having more and more difficulty getting to worship.

“I miss worship,” she said; “it seems that when I don’t attend my week just doesn’t go right.”

Now my first thought was “eew!”

It sounded like superstition: attend worship and you’ll have good luck.

As we talked though, it became clear that wasn’t it at all.

What she found was that worship gave her a focus.

By engaging in it her life was re-centered.

She received motivation for whatever it was she had to achieve.

The rhythmic variety we get from following Jesus is motivating.

It gives energy.

3. When Jesus sets the tempo, it’s perfect.

Following Jesus’ beat for our lives helps us get the maximum out of it.

At the end of our reading today we heard Jesus saying “my yoke is easy.”

For those of us who are used to tractors we need to know a yoke is a piece of wood that goes over the shoulders of an ox.

It is used as a way of attaching a plow to the animal.

In other words it’s a symbol of work.

And yet Jesus makes a point of saying it is “easy.”

So what does that mean?

How can he say that this work is a form of rest?

Well, how we might interpret it is this way:

Jesus is saying that if we follow him there will be work.

He does call us to be involved in doing and giving.

But he also says that the work will fit us perfectly.

He will set up such a rhythm for us that we will hardly notice.

Now, some of you perhaps might want to laugh at that interpretation.

As far as you’re concerned church is wearing you out.

There is just so much to do and so few to do it.

Perhaps, though, the problem isn’t in the tempo Jesus has set up but in the tempo we’ve set up.

We have become so focused on marching to the beat of others expectations that we’ve lost the beat Jesus wants us to follow.

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to make assumptions about what other people should do?

If you are the mother of young children we can assume you are a natural born Sunday school teacher.

If you’re a middle aged man you must be longing to get on the roof and repair shingles.

If you are a youth then you are made to be a gofer for any activity that we schedule.
What happens when we make assumptions like that?
Part of the time we find we are right.
There are mothers of young children who exult in being in the classroom.
There are men who enjoy the opportunity to do some repair work.
There are youth who are glad to help out in all kinds of settings.
But that’s only part of the time.
What we also find is that there are people in those categories who resist all our blandishments and if we try too hard we’ll end up driving them away.
Why? Not because they are lazy but because it’s not who God has created them to be.
The song they need to be singing is something quite different from the song we want them to be singing.
For them to get in the groove we have to help them listen to the beat themselves.

The work of God is not something that should overwhelm us.
When we allow Jesus to set the tempo, it turns out to be perfect.

**Conclusion:**
So, today, I invite us all to feel Jesus’ beat.
Get energized by this worship service.
Enjoy the day.
Anticipate a new tomorrow.
Get in the groove.