

## **Sixth Sunday after Pentecost July 9 2023**

### **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

Some context to our Gospel reading for today. Just prior to this John the Baptist- sitting in prison- has sent his disciples to Jesus asking if he is the one they have been waiting on or if they should wait for another. Jesus says, go tell John what you hear and see; around me... the blind see, the lame walk, lepers cleansed, dead raised, etc. Saying, without saying, who he is. Then he turns to the crowd and identifies John as Elijah- what did you come out to see, huh? Just a show? Nope! Let anyone who has ears listen! Jesus clearly stakes a claim about who both John and he are.

But what does this generation do? They are like kids in the marketplace who won't go along with anything. They complain that John was too ascetic (not eating and drinking) and said he has a demon. They complain that Jesus eats and drinks with people too much! That he is a glutton and a drunkard, plus he hangs with all the wrong people.

In the missing verses in our reading today, Jesus says that not even the pagan cities of Tyre and Sidon or that OT standard of bad behavior, Sodom, not even they would have ignored the deeds of power done by Jesus and what they mean about who he is. Those cities would have repented, which was the basic message of both John and Jesus from the beginning of the gospel, "Repent (change your thinking) for the kingdom of heaven has come near".

Finally, Jesus points out that who he and John are and the coming reign of heaven are known not to the “wise” of this age, but to the infants, to those who we might call naïve. Those who believe the world doesn’t have to work the way it seems to.

Then Jesus asks an important question, “Are you tired of being weighed down by life?”

Well, are you?

What weighs you down in life?

Jesus says, you feel weighed down because you have yoked your life to the wrong thing. What are you yoked to? Money? Power? Fame? Are you yoked to a particular vision of the world? Of our country? Of your life?

All of these can weigh you down. Make life seem like you have to work so hard.

This is the problem with “this generation”. They cannot see Jesus and John for who they are (sent from God) because they are yoked... to a particular understanding of who God is, what right faith is. To other things. So, they make excuses for why they don’t follow Jesus or John. To explain away their teachings and power. He’s too glum. He’s too happy!

Jesus knows this and he keeps telling them, “Repent! Change your thinking!”

Come to me, Jesus says, and I will give you rest. Come to me and I will throw off the yoke of those other gods, things which you fear love and trust more than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God who is father of Jesus. Come to me, Jesus says, and wear my yoke and you will find rest.

Let’s pause a moment here and talk about yokes and rest.

A yoke is a wooden cross piece that was fastened around the neck of two animals and attached to a cart or plow. It was a way of harnessing the power of those animals. Often, when training a new animal to this task, they would be paired with an older and stronger animal who would “guide” them into the task.

To take up a yoke, then, means to do work of some kind.

But Jesus promises rest. Yes, rest for our souls. We feel the heaviness of life not because of physical labor- that can be tiring, certainly- but because the vital breath, soul of our life is worn out by what we encounter. Because it is yoked to something other than Jesus.

Take my yoke, Jesus offers, for it is easy and my burden is light. Easy here does not mean less strenuous, rather it means being superior for a particular purpose. It is well fitted. It makes any burden easy to bear. My yoke, Jesus says, is well suited to who we are created as human beings. Because it is suited for us, that is why it is easy to bear.

So, this rest Jesus offers is not a cessation of labor. Our group on Wednesday night figured that one out right away. Instead, it is the rest in comparison to what we have been doing. Yoked to other gods in pursuit of happiness, balance, the good life. Maybe even physically rested, but still, somehow, with heavy souls.

The rest Jesus offers is the rest of God after creation, when all of creation is in right relationship with one another. It is the rest of the soul when we are about the work of living in the reign of God. It is the peace we find when the labor we do is infused with Jesus.

But it’s still work, isn’t it? Or is it?

What is something you do on a regular basis that some folks would think of as work, and time just seems to fly by for you?

Why do you think that is?

It's because what you are doing matches the gifts and abilities God has given you. In fact, when doing a gifts inventory, one of the things they tell you to test the results is to exercise those gifts and see if it feels like work. If not, then you most likely have that gift.

So, if you are doing the work God has equipped you to do, it doesn't feel like work. Yes, you get tired, and sometimes there is some tedium, but more often than not it becomes an, "I get to do this!" rather than, "I have to do this!" moment.

This is what it means to be yoked to Jesus. To help us learn about the life God has created and called us to live. Life that truly is life!

A life of care for every human being. A life lived in love for our neighbors. A life lived attending to others needs before our own. A life lived knowing that the world is God's and we just get to play in it, and, like scouting teaches us, we should leave it better than we found it.

And we are yoked to Jesus to help us discover what living that life is like. Because we need his guidance. That firm pressure when we start to head off the track. That immovable force that says, "Nope, not that way... we're going this way."

And as we live life yoked to Jesus, we find that it is less stressful. That the burden of life lifts. Because how we are living fits with who God has created us to be. It

does not mean that everything will be all peaches and cream. It does not mean that bad things will not happen to us. The reality of sin still exists in the world. But what it does mean is that how we live will not be a source of that burden.

My yoke is easy, and my burden is light, because it was made for you and you were made for it.

Jesus comes to break us free from all those other things we have yoked our lives to. To give us rest and to call us to the life we were created for.

For our own sakes, yes. But also, for the sake of the whole of creation.

And this is a part of what it means to be the church. The body of Christ in the world. A visible sign of the reign of God. To daily pick up the yoke that ties us to Jesus. To pray, to listen to Jesus in scripture and through the conversations we have with other believers, to practice, practice, practice. To submit to that yoke and where Jesus is taking us even if we think it's a bad idea. Trusting that Jesus knows better than we do.

And the gift to us in this life is the rest of a labor that so fits who we are that we hardly notice the time going by. Have you ever met someone in the faith who just glows? Often they're older, and just as often there is some kind of challenge in their life. But their joy in walking with Jesus is visible. Even without them saying a word. I've met several people like that in my life. And I still strive for that. I pray for that for me and for each of you. Because that is the life that truly is life.

A life of ease for the soul, joy in the heart, and the love of God shown to all.

Come to me, Jesus says. Yoke yourself to me, and I will give you... life.