

Surrender to Christ
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
July 9, 2017 – Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Last week, as we celebrated the Fourth of July, I suggested that we pray for our country, that we pray that we as a nation would put our faith and our trust in God. This week, I want to extend that to a universal prayer, and at the same time take personal responsibility for that faith and trust; because I believe that Jesus places that responsibility on us – personally.

Today's gospel lesson starts with a strong condemnation of society as a whole. Jesus compares himself to John the Baptist, and states that "you," the people, took issue with both. There could scarcely be more different religious leaders than Jesus and John. John lived in the wilderness and ate bugs. Jesus was known to love a good meal with all kinds of company. John wear scratchy shirts on purpose; Jesus invoked the power of God to keep the wine flowing at a wedding reception. John addressed his crowd as a "brood of vipers"; Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount with congratulations. So here, in Matthew, Jesus points out that John came either eating nor drinking, and he was called "a demon." Jesus came eating and drinking, and he was called a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Then comes the conclusion to this dichotomy – "Wisdom is proven to be right by her works." Now, without getting too deep into Feminist Theology, the intent here is to equate the works of Jesus, and probably John, with Wisdom. I mention Feminist Theology... The Greek Word for wisdom is Sophia, a feminine noun. Thus we have the statement that "Wisdom is vindicated by *her* deeds. Over the last several decades, scholars have interpreted the personification of wisdom, Sophia, as the feminine nature of God. That having been said, the first chapter of John, equates Jesus with the Word, in Greek Logos, a masculine noun. Still Logos means more than written words on a page. It also means the common wisdom, the eternal knowledge. Thus, we can rightly say that the Spirit, working in Jesus and John is vindicated, is proven right, by her works, by the healing, by the teaching, by the loving ministry of God in Christ.

After the general condemnation, a condemnation of all society, Jesus turns to prayer. He prays, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you've hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have shown them to babies." Here we need to put those words, "wise" and "intelligent" in quotes. I might say, "You have hidden these things from those who think they know better, from those who are relying on their own thinking instead of trusting in God." It's just a few chapters later that Jesus, while teaching his followers, calls a child over and sits the

child in the midst of the gathering and says, “Truly I tell you, unless you become like children you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”(Matt 18:2-3)

Now friends, I don’t believe that Jesus intends for us to, as I like to put it, “check our brains at the door” when we enter church. “Reason” is one of the four sides in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, along with Scripture, Tradition, and Experience. But what Jesus is saying is “We are not the ultimate authority.” We are called, once again, to trust God – trust God with the trust that a little child has in their parents.

I’ve stated before that I believe Genesis 1:27 is the most important verse in the Bible:

So God created humankind in God’s image.
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.
and God blessed them. . .

And God saw everything he had made, and it was very good.

(Gen. 1:27-28a,31a)

Indeed there is a spark of the divine in each of us. we are all children of God, and we come to God with the trust of a child.

But then comes this well known, and perhaps perplexing verse: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Some of us say, “I’m carrying the burdens, when is the rest coming.” Friends, there is no denying that discipleship can be hard work. Indeed, immediately after the promise of rest, Jesus talks about putting on the yoke. No matter how light the yoke, it’s still a yoke. Discipleship is a constant struggle for faith, love, hope and justice. Discipleship is a constant struggle to live out the call to love all people in the midst of a challenging and sometimes unjust and violent world. True discipleship means working hard to make the world a better place. True discipleship means sometime taking unpopular stands. True discipleship means following in the path of Christ even with the knowledge that path might end in a cross.

So what do we do with the “easy yoke” that Jesus promises in light of the strenuous demands of discipleship. How can Jesus offer rest when he demands so much. Commentator Lance Pape notes that Jesus offers not freedom from work, but freedom from onerous work.¹ I note that, immediately following the instruction “Put on my yoke,” Jesus says, “Learn from Me. I am gentle and humble.” That’s what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about – learning from Jesus, learning from the very personification of God’s amazing love, to reflect that love,

¹ Lance Pape, *Feasting on the Word, Year 1, Volume 3*, David L. Bartless and Barbara Brown Taylor, ed. (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2011) 217.

to be gentle and humble. And sometimes that's the greatest challenge of all, to be gentle and humble; but it's out of the gentleness and humility that the love flows.

Pape goes on to note that "soul-sick weariness is not the inevitable consequence of all work, but rather of work to which we are ill suited, of work extracted under compulsion and motivated by fear, or of work performed in the face of futility."² There is also a certain weariness that comes when one feels that the work they do really doesn't matter.

So again, I must ask, "What about us? What about us as individuals? What about us as a society?" Are we weary? Are we tired? Are we heavy-laden? If the answer to those questions is "Yes," perhaps it's time to make some changes. Perhaps it's time to put on the yoke of Christ. Putting on the yoke of Christ means working toward a purpose in life. It means working with a passion. It means doing your best. It means following your call.

The late religious scholar and mythologist, Joseph Campbell, used to speak of "following your bliss," following your passion, discerning to what God is calling you and making it happen. Now sometimes this does not and cannot happen overnight. I first sensed a call to ordained ministry in 1988. It took time to work through all the details – I entered seminary in 1997, entered full-time service to the church in 2004 and was finally ordained in 2008. Twenty years from my first sense of call to my ordination; but, I set my sights on the ordination in 1988; and I continually moved toward it. Was it work? Of course it was, maintaining a full-time job in Cleveland, while attending seminary in Delaware, Ohio; but the burden was light. The burden was light because I was "on my bliss"; I was following my passion; I was fulfilling what I truly believe was a call of God.

Two weeks ago, we returned from our Work Mission Trip to Buffalo, New York. Now, I generally work harder, during the week that we spend on Mission Trip than any other week of the year. And it's one of the most rewarding weeks of the year. The yoke is easy; the burden is light; because it's a joy to share the love of Christ with our youth, with other adults, and with the people we serve. You can read more about our mission trip in the upcoming Agape newsletter and see a lot more at our Slide Show/Ice Cream Social.

So the easy burden does not mean doing little work. No, the easy burden means having a purpose. The easy burden means working hard to spread the love of God in our thoughts, words, and deeds. To put on the yoke of Christ is to take on the tasks of following a humble and gentle Savior.

Jesus said, "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

² *ibid.*

I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” May it be so.

Let us pray. . .

Lord, lead us; walk with us,
that we may do your work,
that we may work for the furtherance of your kingdom.
Help us to take on your yoke,
that in the midst of that work,
we may find rest for our souls.
Amen.

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