

Year A – Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30  
July 9, 2016

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and from God our Creator! Amen.

This text is rich with material. It's full of emotion - from Jesus' frustration and anger of the religious leaders and elite in verse 16 whom just will never be satisfied and will always want more to perhaps, sadness and disappointment over how they viewed John and then judged Jesus, himself, for those he associated and ate with. And then we turn to some of the most well-known, well-read, and turned to verses in the Bible in Matthew 11:25-30. Can't you just almost catch a glimpse of Jesus standing there, before the crowds, with tears rolling down his face as he looks toward His Father in heaven and gives God glory, honor and thanks? Can't you hear the passion, tenderness, and love in his voice as he speaks of a very intimate Parent-Child relationship he and God have? And don't you almost get goose bumps of excitement that Jesus won't keep that relationship private but wants to share it with anyone willing to listen and invite them into that special bond? And then at the conclusion of the text can't you see Jesus standing before the crowds, eyes focused squarely on them, arms open wide calling out and inviting the people to come to him? Can you hear it? "Come to me, all that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest?" Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. Walk with me and work with me. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

This passage follows a long missionary discourse to his disciples in which he has advised them of the dangers that lie ahead as he sends them out to share in His mission. He has told them it won't be easy and they will encounter resistance, division (even within their own families), persecution and even death. Jesus knows the cross they are called to bear on his behalf will at times burden them greatly. Jesus knows because he has gone before them as 11:1 states, "Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities."

And Jesus also knows that many gathered before him have been carrying the burden of another strenuous, tiresome, and demanding yoke – the yoke of obeying the Torah (God's instruction or law), all 613 of them. It had to have been an impossible, weight-bearing load to carry. And I suspect Jesus is also alluding to the burden and yoke of living under Roman rule. After the fall of Jerusalem and subsequent destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 BCE (AD) many Jewish people became slaves, a practice that ran rampant throughout the Roman Empire, leaving them laboring under an oppressive system of brutality. Others were left to adapt to the Roman culture where polytheism (i.e., worshipping multiple gods) was the religion of the day. The Roman Emperor himself was deemed a god and thus to be worshipped and given allegiance to. Thus, they were experiencing the challenges of how to remain faithful to Yahweh, Israel's God, while living in a society in which worship of so many different gods was the norm. Roman taxation also took a toll on

the working class and was often made further demanding due to unscrupulous tax collectors who added a hefty commission.

Jesus' proclamation of "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 I am humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," surely must have been comforting words. They must have brought so much hope. Things were going to change. All would be made right. Gone would be everything wrong in the world. Yet, that is not what happened. Not everyone was physically healed by Jesus. Like Lazarus, not everyone was brought back from the dead. So where is this rest Jesus speaks of? Where is this yoke, which is easy and this burden that is light? It is in Jesus. Life is found in the living water that stands before them. Not in the law which had become demanding and burdensome on the people and was seen as the way to God and become righteous before God. Not in the Roman Emperor who deemed himself a god. Not in the other gods of the day, which so many turned to. No, true life was found in Jesus. The kingdom of heaven had drawn near. Their thirsty souls, yearning for God, and hope for the future would be met by the water of life that stood before them. Jesus alone would bring the salvation they and the world so desperately needed.

Therein lies the challenge with faith at times. Believing in the midst of a world so often upside down and full of evil that God is still active and present. Believing that the light does in fact still shine through the darkness. Finding hope in things we often can't see. Finding truth in the words Jesus speaks. Seeking rest,

comfort, and release from our burdens. We want the easy answer. The simple solution and when it doesn't come is when remaining faithful can be so challenging. Yet the freedom is there. The freedom of finding rest in Jesus does exist because we are yoked to him. He goes with us. He has opened us up to a God of grace who loves and forgives us even when we succumb to sin. He has conquered death through the cross and opened up the way to eternal life through the resurrection. He has restored us to a right relationship with God. He has made us his own through the waters of baptism. He has claimed us.

We so often want a religion without commitment. We want the freely offered and given grace with no strings attached. All our problems solved. Our burdens gone. No response necessary on our part. Yet that runs so counter to what Jesus has been speaking these last several weeks. Yes, grace is sufficient. Jesus alone has granted our salvation. He alone has rescued us from the stain of sin. Yet, notice he doesn't eliminate our burdens completely. He states, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." We are yoked to Jesus. We are joined to his mission. We are called to respond to this grace as we love God and love our neighbor. At times, this yoke will bring forth a burden. A burden to go where we don't want to go. The burden of giving to God when so many other things demand our time and our money. The burden of loving our neighbor whom we don't agree with. The burden of trying something new for the sake of the gospel. The burden of proclaiming the gospel when so many refuse to listen or deem it useless for their lives. The burden of serving on another committee, council, or some other capacity within the church.

The burden of forgiving a brother or sister who has hurt us. The burden of speaking out against injustice. Indeed it won't be easy, but it will be made light because we don't go it alone. Jesus is with us. He picks us up and gives the courage and strength to move onward. He gives us sight to see the light still shines through the darkness. He gives us ears to hear the call of the Good Shepherd. He frees us from the shackles of sin and doubt and pours out his Spirit upon us to believe, to have faith, and to find rest in the grace and mercy found only in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.