

## July 5, 2020 – Rest, My Yoke is Easy

Based on Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

### Prayer:

How can Jesus' Yoke possibly be easy? His journey through his earthly time was anything but easy. And he offers sharing burdens with us. We will somehow find rest in Jesus. That would seem highly unlikely, given what we know of Jesus' life and ministry.

And aligning with Jesus means committing to discipleship. We know from various bible texts that discipleship was demanding and not necessarily rewarding. Discipleship meant giving up what one was accustomed to, and following into unknown territory. Who among us could make that kind of vow? I am somewhat fearful and have some trepidation of what that kind of dedication means.

Some biblical interpretations suggest "Take my yoke upon you" meant that we are to submit ourselves to Jesus every day and in every way. A yoke as most know was made of wood, hand carved to fit the neck and shoulders of the animal to prevent pain or discomfort. And it was meant to share the load. (Picture 1)

***In ancient culture, the word yoke was a term that was used to describe submission. So, when someone was described as being yoked to someone or something, it was communicating the idea that he or she was in submission. So, (it can be said) to be yoked to Jesus is to serve and obey Him.<sup>1</sup>***

I am uninclined however to think that we are meant to suffer alongside Jesus. And knowing of Jesus' suffering, finding rest for your souls hardly seems like a logical statement. How then can a man who faced so much hardship, betrayal and then death at the hands of oppressors offer us rest?

I wonder if it might make some sense to consider Jesus' vision to be the place where "rest" is found? The vision of course is for a time when equality for all becomes reality, a time where the common good takes the high moral ground. Position, status, and wealth become unimportant.

What is this offer, to share the burden?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/jesus/life-of-jesus/teaching-and-messages/the-yoke-of-jesus-biblical-meaning-and-importance.html>

“Take my Yoke upon you” offers sharing, being in Christ, understanding what it means to hear the pain of others and respond with compassion. It means, like Jesus, offering welcoming arms and understanding to those who have the greatest need, those on the margins, the oppressed, the castaways, the “have nots.” Take my Yoke means being in relationship with Jesus, being in the company of those that are disposed, rejected, and displaced

You are in the company of one who gave his life for justice for all when you share the Yoke of Jesus. You come to understand that people care and honour you for yourself, just as you are. They don’t want to change you and make you someone or something you are not meant to be. You are in the company of those that understand if you are struggling to make ends meet, or if you are criticized because you don’t live in the fanciest house in the best neighbourhood. You are in company of those that get what it must be like to live on the street. You are in the company of someone who may have been abused or at the very least cares enough to want to offer you a place to share your trauma. You are in the company of those that care if you have enough to eat and a place to lay your head. You are “yoked” to them all.

Sharing the yoke with Jesus doesn’t mean signing up for ridicule, expulsion or imprisonment. It doesn’t mean accepting racial slurs, turning the other cheek when someone makes disparaging remarks about your birth right, or ignoring someone who mocks your sexual orientation. It doesn’t mean living in fear or with any indignity or injustice.

Jesus has and will always stand for equity, fairness and unconditional love. Sharing the yoke with Jesus means we seek to understand the plight of others and offer to share burdens with them. Regardless of our circumstance, we open our hearts to hold the unfortunate members of our human family in love.

Unfortunately, too many do not understand and don’t believe in sharing the burden.

***16 "But to what will I compare this generation? Says Jesus. It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn."***

In this first part of this Gospel message comes the challenge, and the reminder from Jesus that, in his time, too few were heading God’s message. God offered love and acceptance rather than self-centredness and privilege. God offered the opportunity to dance

together in harmony. But many would not let God lead them in such a dance.

God, through Jesus pointed to suffering and inequity but the mourning would fall on deaf ears as status and position prevailed. Those with the credentials and the opportunity to support a new world, a new order, stayed silent. They didn't, or refused to understand, they didn't get it! Neither the ministry of John the Baptist or the teachings of Jesus would convince them.

Today the challenge is whether or not we, enough of us, understand, enough of us choose to be yoked to the Holy.

In reference to the US July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations, William Goettler writes, ***“During a week of patriotic celebration, how can we fail to reflect on the ways in which our own generation understands – or fails to understand – the reasons for dancing and the reasons for weeping. We are so often and so easily lulled by the other songs and voices of our culture. Not only do we miss the moments that matter: we regularly dance when we ought to mourn for a world whose burden is heavy and for a people who need rest.”***<sup>2</sup>

Interesting that those words by William were published in 2011. Certainly, things haven't changed much in 9 years. In fact, they may have worsened in many parts of the world. Racial injustice continues to flood the headlines, and not just in the US. It is so incredibly sad that so many still perceive themselves as somehow superior to the descendants of black slaves or indigenous peoples. Non-white immigrants here in Canada seem to be more and more the subject of racist comments or actions. White privilege and imperialist history continue to stand in the way of doing a justice dance with God as our partner. Sharing the yoke of compassion and understanding, the central tenant of Jesus' ministry seems so far from a reality.

**“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.”** In this Jesus is saying, “Understand that the world needs you to carry on this ministry when I am gone. Understand that kindness, generosity, compassion and unconditional love is what my Father is all about.” We understand, and we take the yoke and walk with Jesus when we do those things.

End with a series of slides.

Thanks for listening this morning, Amen

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<sup>2</sup> Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 3, Pp., 212, 214