

OPENING SENTENCE: "I surrender all, I surrender all, All to thee, my blessed savior, I surrender all."

PRAYER of ADORATION: Sovereign God, the whole universe is within your reach, and all things are ordered by your hand. You have claimed us to be your people and appointed us disciples of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. As you have protected our lives, so preserve our souls and keep before us always the vision of our redeemer that we may see and follow and give him glory forever and ever. AMEN.

Sermon: Children Playing

Scripture: Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30

But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another. We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon", the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. At that time Jesus said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 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 gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.
THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD!

In the first few verses, 16-19; Jesus was saddened by the sheer perversity of human nature. To him, men and women seemed to be like children playing in the village square. One group said to the other; "Come on and let's play at weddings, and the others said; We don't feel like being happy today. Then the first group said, All right, come on and let's play at funerals, and the others said; We don't feel like being sad today." No matter what was suggested, they did not want to do it; and no matter what was offered, they found a fault in it.

John the Baptist came, living in the desert, fasting and despising food, isolated from the society of others; and they said of him: "The man is mad to cut himself off from human society and human pleasures like that." Jesus came, mixing with all kinds of people, sharing in their sorrows and their joys, keeping company with them in their time of joy; and they said of him; "He is a socialite; he is a party-goer; he is the friend of the outsiders with whom no decent person would have anything to do."

They called John's self-denial madness; and they called Jesus' sociability laxness of morals. They could find grounds for criticism either way.

The plain fact is that when people do not want to listen to the truth, they will easily enough find an excuse for not listening to it. They do not even try to be consistent in their criticisms; they will criticize the same person, and the same institution, from quite opposite grounds. If people are determined to make no response, they will remain stubbornly unresponsive no matter what invitation is made to them. Grown men and women can be very like spoiled children who refuse to play no matter what the game is.

Then comes Jesus' final sentence in this section: "Wisdom is shown to be right by her deeds." The ultimate verdict lies not with the cantankerous and perverse critics but with events. The Jews might criticize John for his lonely isolation, but John had moved the hearts of men and women to God as they had not been moved for centuries.

The Jews might criticize Jesus for mixing too much in ordinary life and with ordinary people, but in him people were finding a new life and a new goodness and a new power to live as they ought and a new access to God.

It would be well if we were to stop judging people and churches by our own prejudices and perversities, and if we were to begin to give thanks for any person and any church who can bring people nearer to God, even if their methods are not the methods which suit us.

Now in verses 25-30; Here Jesus is speaking out of experience, the experience that the Rabbi's and the wise men rejected him while the simple people accepted him. The intellectuals had no use for him; but the humble welcomed him. We must be careful to see clearly what Jesus meant here. He is very far from condemning intellectual power; what he is condemning is the *intellectual pride*. "The heart, not the head, is the home of the Gospel." It is not cleverness which shuts out; it is pride. It is not stupidity which admits; it is humility. People may be as wise as Solomon; but if they have not the simplicity, the trust, the innocence of the childlike heart, they shut themselves out.

The Rabbi's themselves saw the danger of this intellectual pride; they recognized that often simple people were nearer God than the wisest Rabbi. They had a parable like this. Once Rabbi Berokah of Chuza was in the market of Lapet, and Elijah appeared to him. The Rabbi asked: "Is there among the people in this marketplace anyone who is destined to share in the life of the world to come? At first, Elijah said there was none. Then he pointed at one man and said that that man would share in the life of the world to come. Rabbi Berokah went to the man and ask him what he did. "I am a jailer, said the man, and I keep men and women separate. At night I place my bed between the men and the women so that no wrong will be committed. Elijah pointed at two other men and said that they too would share in the life to come. Rabbi Berokah asked them what they did. "We are merry-makers, they said. When we see a maqn who is downcast, we cheer him up. Also, when we see two people quarrelling with one another, we try to make peace between them. People who did the simple things, jailers, who kept their charges in the right way, those who brought a smile and peace, were in the kingdom.

Again, the Rabbi's had a story like this: An epidemic once broke out in Sura, but in the neighborhood of Rab's residence [a famous Rabbi] it did not appear. The people thought that this was due to Rab's merits, but in a dream they were told ... that it happened because of the merits of a man who willingly lent a hoe and a shovel to someone who wished to dig a grave. A fire once broke out in Drokeret, but the neighborhood of Rabbi Huma was spared. The people thought it was due to the merits of Rabbi Huma ... but they were told in a dream that it was due to the merits of a certain woman, who used to heat her oven and place it at the disposal of her neighbors. Neither the man who lent his tools to someone in need, nor the woman who helped her neighbors whenever she could, had any intellectual standing; but their simple deeds of human love had won them the approval of God. Academic distinctions are not necessarily distinctions in the sight of God.

This passage closes with the greatest claim that Jesus ever made, the claim, which is the center of Christian faith, that he alone can reveal God to men and women.

Other men may be sons of God; he is "The Son of God". John put this in a different way, when he tells us that Jesus said: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). What Jesus says is this: "If you want to see what God is like, if you want to see the mind of God, the heart of God, the nature of God, if you want to see God's whole attitude to men and women – look at me!" It is the Christian conviction that in Jesus Christ alone we see what God is like; and it is also the Christian conviction that Jesus can give that knowledge to anyone who is humble enough and trustful enough to receive it.

Jesus spoke to people desperately trying to find God and desperately trying to be good, who were finding tasks impossible and who were driven to weariness and to despair. Jesus says: "Come to me all you who are exhausted." His invitation is to those who are exhausted with the search for the truth. It is Jesus' claim that the weary search for God ends in Jesus himself. W.B. Yeats, the great Irish poet and mystic, wrote: "Can one reach God by toil? He gives himself to the pure in heart. He asks nothing but our attention."

The way to know God is not by mental search, but by giving attention to Jesus Christ, for in him we see what God is like. Jesus says: "Come to me all you who are weighted down beneath your burdens." For orthodox Jews, religion was a thing of burdens. Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees: "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others" (Matthew 23:4). To the Jews,

religion was a thing of endless rules. People lived their lives in a forest of regulations, which dictated every action. They must listen forever to a voice which said: "You Shall Not".

Even the Rabbi's saw this. There is a parable which shows just how binding and constricting and burdensome and impossible the demands of the law could be. "There was a poor widow in my neighborhood who had two daughters and a field. When she began to plough, Moses [the law of Moses] said: 'You must not plough with an ox and an ass together.' When she began to sow, Moses said, 'You must not sow your field with mingled seed,'.

When she began to reap and to make stacks of corn, Moses said, 'When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it' (Deuteronomy 24:19), and 'You shall not reap your field to its very borders' (Leviticus 19:9). She began to thresh, and Moses said, 'Give me the heave-offering, and the first and second tithe,'. She accepted the ordinance and gave them all to him. What did the poor woman then do? She sold her field and bought two sheep, to clothe herself from their fleece and to have profit from their young. When they bore their young, Aaron [the demands of the priesthood] came and said, 'Give me the first born.' So, she accepted the decision, and gave them to him.' When the shearing time came, and she sheared them, Aaron came and said, 'Give me the first fleece of the sheep' (Deuteronomy 18:4). Then she thought, 'I cannot stand up against this man Aaron. I will slaughter the sheep and eat them.' Then Aaron came and said "Give me the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach (Deuteronomy 18:3). Then she said, "Even when I have killed them, I am not safe from you. Behold they shall be devoted " Then Aaron said, "In that case they belong entirely to me" (Numbers 18:14). He took them and went away and left her weeping with her two daughters." The story is a parable of continuous demands that the law made upon people in every action and activity of life. These demands were indeed a burden. Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon our shoulders. The Jews spoke of the yoke of the law, the yoke of the commandments, the yoke of the kingdom, and the yoke of God. But it may well be that Jesus took the words of his invitation from something much nearer home than that.

He says, "My yoke is easy". The word easy can mean well-fitting. In Palestine, ox-yokes were made of wood: the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted, so that it fit well, and not chafe the neck of the patient animal. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox.

Jesus says, "My yoke fits well." What he means is, "The life I give you is not a burden to cause you pain; your task is made to measure, to fit you."

Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly. Jesus says: "My burden is light." It is not that the burden is easy to carry; but it is laid on us in love; and love makes even the heaviest burden light. When we remember the love of God, when we know that our burden is to love God and to love one another, then our burden becomes like a song. There is an old story which tells how a man came upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy on his back. "That's a heavy burden for you to carry," said the man. "That's no burden, came the answer. "That's my brother." The burden which is given in love and carried in love is always light.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Eternal God, source and goal of all life, lead us to life eternal by the mighty love of Jesus Christ, who suffered on the cross, was raised from the dead, and lifted into glory where with outstretched arms he welcomes the world in his strong and loving embrace. In his holy name we pray, now and forever.
AMEN.

BENEDICTION:

Rest is not offered to the strongest and the most powerful. Rest is offered to those who have been made weary by a world that fails to comprehend the burden of injustice. The yoke is made easy by the

heavenly powers coming to the aide of those whose ways this world fails to understand. GO IN
PEACE!