

SUMMER

SERMON SERIES 2020



Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Canada
In Mission for Others

Sunday, July 5 2020

Rev. Prema Samuel

Matthew 11:16–19, 25–30

We have a lot of great sayings that we use to try and pluck up our courage in difficult times. “Whatever doesn’t kill you only makes you stronger.” “You can pull yourself up by your own bootstraps.” “Suck it up.” And so on and so forth. We remind ourselves that we are tough, strong people, perfectly capable of handling anything thrown our way. After all, we have done it before, so we can do it again. We can’t be weak. We have to bear the difficult times on our shoulders. That’s what it means to take responsibility and live our lives, doesn’t it? We need to be tough and not shirk responsibility.

Yet, over the last number of weeks and months, how many of us have felt close to breaking, close to being completely overwhelmed by the events of 2020? We are faced with a global pandemic that has caused so much of our society to screech to a halt. We are faced with economic fall-out that will plague us for many years as a result of trying to curb the spread of the pandemic. There are also signs of a rising mental health crisis in our world, a crisis that will impact our world in very real, very serious ways. We have seen racial tensions explode in the United States and throughout the world, forcing all of us to look deeply at beliefs we may not have even realized we held. It is a shake-up of the very world order, and we are standing right in the middle of it. Our own treatment of our indigenous brothers and sisters in this country should give us serious reason to pause if we are ever tempted to point fingers at our friends to the south.

Do you still feel the need to stand alone? Do you still feel the need to believe that your own strength is good enough to face a world that has changed so drastically and so fast that most of us can’t even fathom what it may look like when everything is said and done? The reality is that not one of us is strong enough to weather this time on our own. Not one of us

has all of, or perhaps any of, the answers. We are lost right now. And you know what, it is ok to admit that. We are lost.

But we won't admit it. Not really. Secretly, many of us hope that we return to the world we knew before all of this happened. We just need to get through this and things will go back to normal. We hold on to that fantasy, even as we know the truth of the matter. There isn't any going back.

That is the kind of truth that can break us if we try and stay stalwart and strong. But we are not called upon to be stalwart and strong. We are called on to be honest about our hurt, our fear and our anxiety about the future. We might be horrible about naming those truths, yet it is not our strength that is needed. It is the ability to name what we are feeling and then to trust. We need to find it in ourselves to let go and truly know that God guides us.

Perhaps that is why Jesus, in our reading from Matthew, mentions that the cynical and dismissive audience around him, who dismissed John the Baptist as an ascetic and Jesus as a drunkard, are so wrapped up in the myth of their own superiority that they simply cannot hear what Jesus is trying to tell them. They can't. Their ears are blocked. Instead, God's will is revealed to infants. The young understand.

It is not the first time Jesus mentions or engages with children. Children often become a measuring stick which Christ uses against the adults he is surrounded with. The children get it, through their innate trust, their openness, their lack of suspicion. They know what it is to trust because their whole life depends on it. They know this. And it translates into their life of faith as well. We complain about people with a "Sunday School" faith, lacking true maturity and discernment, but those children, with a Sunday school faith, are more willing to trust and be guided by God than many of us.

I don't think that we are being served too well right now relying on our own strength and our own stubborn belief in how things should be. The yoke that we are choosing to pick up as we make this choice is a heavy, killing yoke. It is a burden too great for any of us. It is the kind of burden that breaks people, relationships, and communities. We think it is our responsibility to bear this yoke. But it isn't. It never has been.

One of the songs we liked to sing in the Long-Term care homes where I served as a Chaplain was, *"Are you weary, are you heavy hearted, tell it to Jesus."* I don't need to reiterate again the kinds of burdens the residents and their loved ones carry.

Dalit Christians in India sing, *"Cast your burden on the Lord, for he cares for you."* They did not believe in a magical Jesus to wipe their burdens and tears, but they believe because this Jesus is one who understands their overwhelming weight of it.

This is the invitation we are given again in our Gospel today Jesus, speaking to his audience, encouraged them to come to him and he would give them rest from that which was killing them. Those words echo throughout history. They are words that speak to us now, as we struggle under the burden of this time in history. *"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 welcome we hear again in our Gospel today Jesus, speaking to his audience, encouraged them to come to him and he would give them rest from that which was killing them. Those words echo throughout history. They are words that speak to us now, as we struggle under the burden of this time in history.

Words of hope, if ever hope could have a voice. Our saviour is asking us, imploring us, to come as children do, with the trust and hope of a child. Can we? Are we truly open to being set free?

Because there is a caveat, as there always is in matters of faith. To be set free is not to be free for whatever pleasure may come our way. To be set free is to be set free into a life where we can stand with our brothers and sisters of color, where we can fight for the rights of the created world, where we can dream of a world with a new economic order that doesn't leave the poor behind but resembles what God had in mind all along, manifested so beautifully in the covenant Yahweh established with the people of Israel. A new kind of society, based on justice, equality, and a place for all people. We cannot champion any of

this if we are crushed under the burden of our own solitary pride. We cannot truly follow Christ if we are arrogant enough to believe that we are strong enough on our own.

So, let your burden go. Give it to Christ and then re-enter the world made new by the grace of God and the freedom which that gives to us in to love all people. "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." The world may break us. But God will lift us up, so that we in turn may lift up others. In this difficult time, such news, such good, amazing news, truly is balm to the soul.

Amen.