

Finding Rest from the Tyranny of the Yoke 8 Pentecost A

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

When we hear the last verses of the gospel today what comes to mind? "God knows how hard my life is. He knows the trials I have faced and endured and he is in my corner. That's what the gospel means."

Let me challenge you to widen your thinking about the "tyranny of the yoke" Jesus speaks of in the gospel. It is the tyranny of our expectations, though specifically, Jesus speaks concerning those whom God sends to lead us. It is the burden of the merry-go-round of sin that we feel powerless to control as St Paul discusses in Romans. It is also the longing of being set free from being a "prisoner of hope" in the prophet Zechariah, to being restored doubly when we lose everything. In all of these scriptures I see "good news." They are linked in a vivid way.

I don't know farming like our Trinity family, the Ends do. I would suggest that very few small farmers today if any use beasts of burden such as cattle to farm. In third world countries one can find yoked animals used to plow a field when there is no machinery to do the job. Jesus uses this idea of a yoke.

A bow yoke was commonly used employing a wooden crosspiece fastened to a U – shape piece called an oxbow fitted so that the force of the animal's shoulders could drive the plow. Yoking oxen always means two or a pair of oxen. But few farmers in Jesus day could afford more than one ox or bull. A human yoke is a bar carried across the shoulders, by which a person can carry goods, such as two pails of milk, one at either end. It would certainly be easier if the burden was shared between two animals or people. There would especially be a lot less spilled milk.

The idea here is that Jesus shares our burden. His yoke is easy, his burden is light. We should not for a New York minute; think that what he endured and suffered was easy. What did he make easy then? Let's go on.

Jesus speaks of expectations that disappoint us. He was not suggesting that we should expect less of our leaders or of God. There was a consistent problem that he identifies. There is a game going on which he likens to children calling to each other without getting any

response. They play the flute and there is no dancing. The children wail but there is no one to mourn with them. Jesus compares the unmet expectations of children to those adults who say, "Look at John the Baptist, he's out there fasting and eating locusts and talking to himself. He must be out of his mind. He has got to be possessed by a demon." Then Jesus, the Son of Man comes along, and he does the opposite, eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, so he must be a glutton and a drunkard besides being out of his mind." Conclusion: if God has called you to be prophetic don't count on making people happy.

Jesus compares the people of his generation to their children running around the marketplaces. He makes the point that even though the expectations of the children go unmet, they keep on playing the flute though no one listens and they will surely keep crying at the top of their lungs when no one cares. Children go on undeterred. It must be the reason that Jesus tells the disciples, "If you want to know what heaven is like listen and watch the children, and don't be so full of yourselves."

Yet there is this tyranny of the yoke that keeps us bound to the same way of seeing life. What can break the yoke of thinking only one way? The Tories thought the Whig party was too loyal to King George. Finally the patriots thought that both parties were nuts and that being a libertarian was the best way to go. "Give me liberty or give me death!" Today the liberals think those conservatives are going to take away our civil rights and the conservatives see the liberals as being too permissive with our hard earned freedom. Every church says, "We welcome you" but you must think the way the majority thinks. The tyranny of expectation – is a yoke that is hard and a burden that is heavy.

The yoke of sin aptly describes this tyranny. The apostle Paul in our second reading struggles with it and he from his own experience nails down for us the battle. There is a war going on inside and outside him. He doesn't understand his own actions. We have all heard people say, "I don't know why I say those things." As if their feet taste so good! "I don't know why I see life that way – I just do!" As if they can't take off their sunglasses.

The apostle wants to do one thing but he does another. "Just say, 'No,' Paul! You are out of control!" He is. In fact he writes that it is no longer he that does what he does not want to do. He points the finger at sin! Some of us remember the comedian, Flip Wilson,

dressing up as a woman named Geraldine who would constantly say, "The devil made me do it!" Was the apostle, sent by Jesus Christ, making an excuse? First he blames the law of sin operating inside of him, then he blames the wretched body he is wearing, but at least he did not blame the devil like Geraldine did! In fact, there is no mention of the devil in the entire book of Romans. Paul writes of that "toad" in four other epistles. In Romans, however, he writes only of the sin that originates with you and me. The only way to defeat the tyranny of sin and its yoke is to nail it to the cross of Jesus Christ! Old Scratch, as Daniel Webster called him, will have his way, as long as we declare our Independence from the Lordship of Jesus Christ!

God has given so many good things that we have destroyed. Might we be able to get it right? Are we condemned to some law of karma? There is cycle of tyranny: the unmet expectations we have, the law of sin, prisoners of hope that never see true freedom because of this treadmill. Unless we take them to the cross of Jesus and take on His yoke there is no rest. Scientists, last year, had the privilege of measuring the age of the oldest living creature on record off the shores of Iceland. It was a clam determined to be between 405 and 410 years. The oldest tortoise was 176 years. To measure the age of this molusc they unfortunately had to cut through its shell to count its annual rings and in so doing they killed it. In trying to study its life and gaining knowledge of climate change they turned it into clam chowder!

The good we would want to do, we do the opposite. May we be on watch, may we be mindful of the deception that all is well. We have much work to do. Jesus does remove the yoke entirely from us but thanks to Him, the tyranny of the yoke is made easy and light. He comes along side us and puts His broad shoulders against the bow. Instead of two footprints now there are four. Go forth in joy rejoicing in the power of the Spirit! Prisoners set free for liberty we can make the burdens of others around us...light. AMEN