

Encourage and Bear One Another's Burdens
Matthew 11:28-30, Galatians 6:2-10
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I recently read an old legend about three people on life's journey. Each of them carried a backpack and another satchel as well. When asked, the first person said, "in the backpack I keep all the good things friends and family have done. That way they're hidden from view. In the front I carry all the bad things that have happened to me. Every now and then I stop, I open the front sack and take the things out, examine them and think about them." Because he did this so often, he was not making much forward progress in his life.

When asked about her burdens, the second person replied:

"In the front sack are all the good things I've done. I like to see them, so quite often I take them out to show them off to people. The backpack? I keep all my mistakes in there and carry them all the time. They get heavy and they slow me down, but I just can't seem to get rid of them."

The third person explained: "The sack in front is great--that's where I keep all the positive thoughts I have about people, all the blessings I've experienced, and all the great things others have done for me. The weight is not a problem, it is light as a feather, and I'm able to keep moving forward. My backpack? It's empty--nothing in it. That's where I put all the bad things I can think about myself or that I hear about others. The go in, but because I cut a big hole in the bottom of it--out they go! So I'm not carrying any extra weight at all! (revised from H. Norman Wright, The Perfect Catch, p. 28, Bethany House publisher)

While no one carried obvious burdens in here this morning, I am quite sure that given our human condition, everyone carried in with you some kind of "burden" or concern which may in fact, be weighing heavily upon your heart and mind even at this very moment.

We shall be considering how these two scriptures address the whole idea of carrying burdens.

From the Gospel reading, Jesus issues an invitation to us.

He says "Come--Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

First of all, given the context, he is talking to the good religious folks of his day; the ones who were serious about their Jewish faith, which meant making every attempt to

keep the Law--the Torah--the commandments and so many more--to the best of their ability. For the good Jew, attempting to keep the Law could indeed become burdensome. Why? Because no one can keep it perfectly or in its entirety.

In fact, there are many today who believe that if they are just "good enough", they can please God and that will be enough to get into heaven.

But Jesus says no, it doesn't work that way.

We are saved by grace through faith. We do nothing but trust in Christ's total sufficiency because he was perfect and we are far from it. That is the gift of grace.

SO here when Jesus says "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and burden is light."

1--**Jesus is telling us that we need not go through this life alone.** Life is difficult. SO Jesus' invitation is to COME TO HIM, and to link up with him by means of a yoke. Now Jesus lived in an agrarian culture. Oxen would be paired together to pull loads of significant size. They were "beasts of burden". A yoke is a work instrument. One might think that Jesus would offer someone who is overworked and stressed out, a vacation or a gift certificate for a massage. **Instead of offering escape, Jesus offers companionship by means of a yoke--a new way of carrying life's responsibilities and concerns.** Jesus is realistic. Life will have its burdens, Jesus offers equipment, if you will, for support.

2--by yoking or linking up with Jesus, we are really joining forces with Jesus, who promises to walk with us, side by side, a companion through life.

2--**Learn from me-- not just about me--**by linking up with Jesus we join ourselves to him in close proximity and intimacy. We learn Jesus' ways. We listen to and obey Jesus' instruction/teaching which is found in the Word of God, the Bible. The Grk. "to learn" the very same Greek word for disciple. Disciple means "learner". **This is an image of Teacher and student walking together, progressing side by side down the road of life.**

Jesus is inviting us to...

Come--take my yoke--Learn from me--

because I am gentle and simple at heart--

and you will experience refreshing deep down in your souls

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

One night after being tucked into bed, the five year old cried out yet again...not for another story or a drink of water, but saying "I'm scared."

The dad, from the warmth of his own bed replied: "It's ok... God is with you in Spirit."

"I know," the son replied, "but **I need God with skin on.**"

I don't know about you, but sometimes I need "God with skin on." So do we--we need "God with skin on". We have that in the incarnation--in Jesus. But we also have that within the church, the body of Christ. For we are called to be Jesus feet, going where Jesus would go,

We are called to be Jesus' voice, offering encouragement, forgiveness, hope.

We are called to be Jesus' hands and shoulders, helping to bear one another's burdens.

In that way we are Christ to one another—we are "God with skin on" for one another. That is called "incarnational ministry".

In the epistle reading, Paul writes about two different types of burdens, using two different Greek words (v.2,5) They do not contradict each other but are two sides of the same coin.

The first burden to which he refers is the fact that each one of us will carry

Burdens or experience struggles in life; these can be shared, and in the sharing the burden becomes lighter.

The second burden to which he refers (v.5) is that God will hold each one of us accountable for our actions.

All of this is in the context of living our lives not in the flesh—that is under our own power, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This text emphasizes personal responsibility as well as mutual accountability.

Paul writes in Galatians: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

What is the law of Christ? Surely **not** all the 10 plus 590 commandments in the OT.

No. When asked "**What is the greatest commandment?**" Jesus replied:

LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength, and your neighbor as yourself.

So when we bear one another's burdens, we fulfill the "law" of LOVING one another.

Rick was a young man in his late 20s when I met him. He had come to know Christ through a men's Bible study and he found sobriety through a 12-step Christian recovery group at the same church. He was engaged to a young woman named Becky and they were married. Soon after, Becky became pregnant, but had complications which required bed rest. She could not work.

However they were carrying another kind of burden too because Rick was facing trial for some drunk driving charges that had been pending for some time. He was guilty; he knew it, he was willing to do whatever the court decided however there was one mitigating circumstance. Rick's job required driving all over the Portland metro area delivering newspapers and magazines to stores like Fred Meyer, Safeway, and so on.

What to do? Many were praying. Rick's lawyer put together a plan. When the day came for his hearing, Rick had quite a group of "burden bearers" show up including his employer. On hearing the details of Rick's situation, and the plan the lawyer presented, the judge agreed.

Rick was sentenced to stay in the recovery program and report back regularly to the court; Rick's driver's license was suspended for 6 months, with the provision that he could drive for his employer, but at no other time could he be behind the wheel of a vehicle.

In other words, for six months, Rick needed someone to drive him to and from work, 5 days a week. Becky couldn't do it. But the burden bearers did--seven men from his Bible study created a calendar and signed up. Some took the morning drive, others took the evening commute. Rick never missed a day of work during those six months. The court was pleased, the judgement satisfied, the burden shared.

Many of you bear the burdens of others –often in quiet, behind the scenes ways:

- by providing financially for a needy student's education through Compassion International, World Vision, Village Steps or Faith in Action in the Philippines.
- by preparing and delivering meals
- by providing transportation to worship, Dr. appointments, treatments
- by doing yardwork—mowing the 80 year old widow's lawn when you mow your own
- by providing childcare
- a 90 year old friend of mine with a sewing machine, does simple mending and repairs on clothing for her neighbors in her senior apartment complex. No charge.
- I am acquainted with a dentist who spends at least 2 weeks a year providing free dental with a short term mission group in Mexico.
- the list could go on...
- you fill in the blank...you do so much, so quietly.

Burden bearing does not grab headlines, but it does build the Kingdom of God.

There are seasons in our lives when we are the ones to come alongside another and offer the support that the other needs...and there are seasons in our lives when we are the recipients of such support. That is why these mutuality commands can be difficult for us to live into...it is easier to help another than it is to be on the receiving side of things.

Perhaps that is why Paul mentions pride having no place in this equation, but we are to humbly bear one another's burdens, and receive this as a gift with humility as well!

Exactly one year ago this week I badly sprained my ankle and for six weeks while it healed, I could not drive. Some of you stepped up and helped drive me to and from Enumclaw—which was no small task! It was a good lesson in receiving, as among

lessons I learned, is that many are glad to help and serve with joy. To deprive you of that, would be wrong! And I was blessed to be the recipient of much love as you drove me to/from Des Moines.

May the Holy Spirit fill us and empower us to truly fulfill the "law of Love" and bear one another's burdens" as together we walk, yoked with Christ who would be our constant companion and burden bearer.

Let us pray...