

A NEW "LOCUS OF CONTROL"

J.j. St. Paul's Lutheran Church, 57th & Broadway, Sacramento, CA
Third Sunday after Pentecost, A.D. 2011, July 3

Mt. 11:16-30 16 "But to what will I compare this generation? 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.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 19 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."

20 Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you."

25 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; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 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.

28 Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

When you think about that yoke Jesus talks about, you have to think about control, don't you?

I picture a big, heavy block of wood with two carved-out-places under each end so that it can rest on the necks of two oxen.

That yoke is there to control them.

So then I remembered "locus of control." Don't worry about the fancy Latin word. It's a psychological term coined by the type of psychologist that loves to give psychological tests & evaluations.

"Locus of control" is all about what motivates a person -- from where do we get the direction of our lives? From inside ourselves or from outside. What guides us?

Dr. Will Schutz of Harvard U. wrote about control in his book, "The Interpersonal Underworld," [Science & Behavior Books, Inc., Palo Alto, CA, 1966] and he talked about it in terms of horizontal relationships among people.

He wrote, "The need for control manifests itself as the desire for power, authority, and control over others ... [or] ... the need to **be** controlled, to have responsibility taken away." [p. 22, emphasis added]

Does that illustrate anything in today's Gospel? Well, let's see.

If there is a "new" locus of control, then there probably is an ...

Part 1. ..."OLD" LOCUS OF CONTROL

And we see that in the first verses of our text,

Jesus said, **v.16 "But to what will I compare this generation? 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.'**

What do you hear? Children at play. But these children are complaining because they couldn't control their playmates.

"We piped, we cried -- you wouldn't do what we wanted. Waaaaaah."

Here's the comparison that our Lord makes: **18 For**, Jesus said, you are like children because, **John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 19 the**

Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

John the Baptist lived one way -- I, the Son of Man, live another way -- and you don't like either one of us because you can't change us, you can't control us. You're like bossy little children!

What psychologist Schutz called our 'need for control' shows up in our judgements of others.

We think they should do thus & so, and we may not say it to their face, but we sure act like a judge.

That's because we are all legalists at heart, and our law is the old measuring stick of Moses.

We use Moses' Law like a ruler to measure others, but by doing so we, too, have slid back under the old yoke, the old locus of control.

We like to be in control, we are part of **"this generation"**, and so we tend to judge others where we do not have a call to do so.

But the worst part is that we judge God! We think God's ways are wrong!

Why does God let such evil men & women rule us? Why did God let that young person die? Why does God let me struggle so hard to find food and shelter in this inflated economy? We judge God and His ways.

We want to do better, but can we? Remember what St. Paul wrote in today's second lesson: **"I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. for what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do -- this is what I keep on doing.... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Rm. 7 NIV)**

But God has a judgement for us. It is found in those verses of Matthew that are left out of today's Gospel reading. They go like this:

[20 Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! ... 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades. For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you."]

"...his deeds of power" Our Lord had performed signs and wonders -- miracles of healing -- in those cities of Judea and Israel, but they did not repent.

They did not change their ways and believe in the coming of the new kingdom, the new gospel way of love, which he, the Messiah, was bringing.

"The day of judgement," Jesus said, will be a day of woe for them --they **"will be brought down to Hades."**

Is this coming clear for you? You see, Dr. Schutz from Harvard is interested in inter-personal behavior -- horizontal relationships among people.

Our Lord is interested in that, too, but he speaks of the vertical relationship w/ our Almighty Maker -- the new locus of control is a gift from above.

I think it's obvious that we need it.

Part 2. A New LOCUS OF CONTROL Means a New Yoke For Us to Wear

As our Gospel story moves along, we notice that our Lord Jesus said, **v.29 "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;..."**

What I read here is that He first bore that yoke. **"My yoke,"** He said, **"Take my yoke."** What yoke is that? His yoke is in the shape of a cross!

Yes, He carried the yoke of obedience to His Father -- upon that cross.

He carried the yoke of forsakenness by His Father -- upon that cross.

He bore the yoke of death on our behalf -- upon that cross.

We always have trouble with that great mystery of God's self-sacrifice.

But Jesus reminds us, v. 19b: **"Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."**

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, **"Since in the wisdom of God [we] did not know God through wisdom," (1 Cor. 1:21)** it was His wisdom to resolve our locus of control issues, and every other problem, within Himself.

This is the wisdom that was vindicated -- proven to be right: in the wisdom of God He gives us, as a gift, exactly what He demands of us, i.e., right living, righteousness, perfection.

That gift was paid for on the cross. Our Lord Jesus took the yoke of death for us.

Now Jesus says, **"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;..."**

That's another way of stating the Gift: we are free to be infants, God's dear children who trust in Him for control of our lives.

What is new about us now is that we are not the petulant, complaining, and controlling children mentioned earlier.

These things are hidden from the "wise and intelligent" but are offered freely to us.

So Jesus invites every one of us today, v 28, **"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 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. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

What an invitation! **"Come to me, all you that are weary..."** Our new locus of control is the kindly yoke of the Christ.

He takes His place in our hearts and guides and controls us from there.

We are now free to be followers, free to be responsible under the burdens of living.

Because our Lord loved us and carried the yoke of the cross for us, His yoke is easy, His burden light.

I will close with a story.

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college.

He is brilliant and looks like he is always pondering something profound. He became a Christian while attending college.

Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students but are not sure how to go about it.

One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair. The service has already started and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat.

The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet to listen.

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Bill.

Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and a three-piece suit. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do.

How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy.

The church is utterly silent except for the sound of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.

And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him.

[CHICKEN SOUP FOR THE SOUL, Eds.: Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen. This story by Rebecca Manley Pippert]

Our God lowered Himself for us in the Person of His Son. Jesus took the yoke of death and set us free -- free to pick up our yoke/cross and follow Him. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g.

-- The Rev. Dr. Donald Schedler, Ph.D., Chaplain, Snowline Hospice, Diamond Springs, CA.