

**Sermon, Proper 9A, July 5, 2020, Jane A. Beebe**

“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.” (Matthew 11:29)

Jesus said to the crowd, “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.’

*Once again I see a theme of Jesus encouraging the disciples to be as “little ones,” as children. To be childlike is not to be immature, or even without wisdom. Jesus sees himself as God’s child; God sees Jesus as his beloved.*

*With a lowliness in spirit, we can retain the wonder of the child. We can receive God with trust. The children in the marketplace share their joy and their sorrow. They are transparent and authentic. There is a way in which, if we simply are who we are, we can let go of what burdens us.*

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.”

*Both John and Jesus come with a message of repentance. They preach that the Kingdom of God has come near. Repentance, turning to God, restores the wondering vision of a child, allowing us to see that Kingdom.*

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.

*Whenever it was that Baptism took place, whether as babies, young children, or adults, this being born anew restores our vision. We become as infants again. Vulnerable, yes, yet with renewed trust. Jesus tells us that this is God’s grace.*

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.

*This is one of the mysteries of the Trinity: the sacred parent-child relationship. It is a lovely thing to know and be known. I do not think Jesus is speaking here of some impossible, esoteric puzzle that we must solve in order to know God. Rather, Father and Son are demonstrating their love in terms human beings can understand. The Word truly has become flesh, and dwells among us. (John 1:14)*

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

*It is so easy when we are weighed down, to give up. How do we summon the energy? We long to rest. We hope for Sabbath time when we can simply be present to God. We can trust the voice of Jesus. The wait is over. We can approach. Jesus offers rest as a gift.*

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;

*As other preachers have probably told you, the yoke for oxen is a double yoke. We are not meant to bear our burdens alone. As the saying goes, “A joy shared, is a joy doubled. A sorrow shared, is a sorrow halved.” The other meaning of the Greek word for yoke used here is the straight bar that holds scales for weighing. We not only have help carrying our burdens. Whatever we lack is balanced for us by Jesus’ help and presence. On the one hand we are released; on the other we are restored.*

...For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

*In the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew we are given Jesus’ human genealogy, we have a depiction of his baptism by John, and then we hear that Jesus is “led up by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil.” (Matthew 4:1) After this Jesus begins his ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing. It is in the Beatitudes of chapter 5 that we begin to learn of Jesus deep understanding of what really constitutes blessing. He tells us it is the poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are pure in heart who are inheritors of the Kingdom. He knows these things because he lives them; he is the ultimate exemplar of what it means to live in God’s Kingdom. All of us know what it means to be physically weary. However, Jesus promises rest for our souls. This is the Sabbath rest that we were given by God in Creation, that we can still receive if we venture close to God. As a human being, Jesus understands our inadequacies, our childlike insecurities, our suffering, and even abandonment. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15)*

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

*It is hard to imagine a yoke that would actually lighten our loads, that would not add to what we are carrying. Whatever I may know about a yoke like this comes from the Twelve Steps. It is so hard to admit we are powerless over some things, much less how that act would lead to restoration. Jesus has told us today that, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father...” (Matthew 11:27) In 1 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:27) This is the power of the Resurrection, yet it comes by way of the cross.*

When I began to think of those I have met who also are “gentle and humble in heart,” and who, because of that quality, have given me rest for my soul, I remembered the law firm I engaged to help me with my father’s estate after he died. Many of you know how difficult it is to face legal and financial decisions while grieving or facing any other of life’s hurdles. My father lived in North Carolina, a state that requires a local contact for probate; hiring a lawyer seemed best. Not really knowing where to start, I called the firm my father had used to draw up his will: Shuford, Cagle & McClellan. Mr. Shuford was, of course, my father’s age! I think he had been a high school classmate of my father’s. Thankfully he had taken on new partners over the years, and the office was still going. As it turned out, their specialty was handling estate matters. They immediately put me at my ease. I arranged to travel to North Carolina to meet with them in person. The person who handled most of the paperwork was Mr. McClellan’s legal assistant. She was unusually kind and patient with me. I learned she had been widowed as a fairly young woman. I believe this gave her particular insight and compassion for me, and, I am sure, for the other clients of the law firm. She was careful and accurate in every detail. She celebrated with me when things went smoothly, when deadlines were met; she was reassuring when things seemed confusing. To say that she lightened my load is an understatement. I remain deeply grateful. Clearly God was with us. I found rest for my soul at a time I least expected it.