

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30, 2014

Hearing the first part of this gospel lesson it sounds like Jesus has found himself in a no win situation.

Have you ever found yourself in one of those situations where no matter what you do no one is going to be satisfied?

Or have you ever found yourself dissatisfied with someone and it doesn't matter what they do you are not going to like it? No matter what this person does it is an annoyance to you?

When you stop and look at the situation you discover it isn't what they are doing or saying that annoys, but who they are.

Or maybe it is something else all together.

Maybe the issue is not with them but with you, your own heart, your own unwillingness to love the neighbor,

or your own unwillingness to change.

It sounds like Jesus is going through a time when it doesn't matter what He does, or how God tries to reach the people, they will not be satisfied.

Jesus points out that John the Baptist was sent living an austere life neither drinking nor eating and the people said he had a demon.

Jesus comes eating and drinking and He is called a drunkard and glutton, and ridiculed for eating and drinking with the wrong sorts of people.

Well folks which is it that will make you happy. What is it that will satisfy you?

John and Jesus are both dismissed by many as irrelevant in their day and time.

Jesus says that the people are acting like children who can't play nicely together.

The one side wants to do one thing and the other something else and they cannot agree. In the end they will do nothing.

In a conversation with a colleague a few weeks ago I was asking what it takes to motivate and inspire people to engage in the ministry of the church, to even come to worship or to study together

and she said to me that while it may appear that we have to compete with many other things that would take our people's time, energy, effort, our greatest challenge is to overcome their inclination to do nothing.

I had not thought of it in those terms and that seemed quite profound
Doing nothing is easy.

Jesus has carried out his work in word and deed so that the people may learn who he is. In the previous chapters Jesus has taught the crowds with His sermon on the mount,

He has healed the centurion's slave, the paralytic, 2 blind men, and many others, cleansed a leper and cast out demons, and yet his contemporaries prefer to sit on the sidelines, uninvolved in what He has going on,

and doing nothing rather than taking seriously Jesus' message of life and salvation, his ministry to the people or the work of His disciples.

This gospel lesson is a call to discipleship, a call to take up the work of Jesus in this world in need of hearing what he has to say,

In need of healing, love and care.

Jesus calls us over the other voices, desires and pressures;

“Come to me, 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.”

It sounds like Jesus is inviting you to rest for a while in some of the words that He says, and at the same time there is this taking up His yoke, His cause, His purpose; Jesus' ministry.

There are a few things to notice about what Jesus is saying here.

First, of course, is this yoke of Jesus.

You may have noticed that I have already interpreted it as Jesus' purpose or cause, or His ministry.

This is what He calls us to but then shows us the easier way through the use of that same word.

I learned a long time ago that many of our young people don't know what a yoke is because they have not been exposed to an agricultural environment, and so for those who are not familiar with farm language, especially our children, a yoke is a

farm tool that is placed around the shoulders of a horse, or ox or mule to allow it to pull some other farm equipment like a plow and do its work.

Sometimes a yoke would be used to hook a number of horses up to a covered wagon or a coach to provide transportation like in the early days of our own country.

The interesting thing about this yoke which makes it relevant for us today is that you could hook a number of animals together, you could yoke them together so they would pull together.

The yoke would help the animals to pull in the same direction.

Jesus' yoke, His mission, does that same thing for us today. It draws us together, binds us together to carry out the mission Jesus has given us to speak His message of life, love and salvation,

and to carry out his mission in deeds of healing, caring and providing for others.

He also says, "Learn from me."

There are of course many ways we can learn from Jesus. We can read the gospel stories about him and allow Him to teach us by example.

We can read Paul's letters and learn from them what the church is called to be about, how the church members are to live and work together,

how the church carries out its ministry in the community and the world through its members.

One of the commentators I read this week talked about pastors he knew who required the church members to go out on visits to potential members, to the sick, the care facilities and hospital with him to mentor and teach them. Some would say, "What are we paying the pastor for?" The pastor's answer was, "You are paying me in part to teach you to be disciples."

Discipleship is an important witness to our faith in Jesus.

Finally, Jesus says, "...you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

If you are out carrying out the ministry of Jesus, how can that ever be restful and how is that yoke easy and light?

First off, Jesus doesn't say that it will be restful to your body, but your soul which casts that rest in a whole different light.

You will experience the joy and love and grace of God as you carry out the ministry that He is calling you to.

Some of you have experienced that in serving others. How many times have you heard it said by those who went on a mission trip or served in the community,

“I get more out of it that they do.”

We all have burdens, things we carry around with us. Sometimes they are worries, sometimes job stresses, or retirement stresses

or the sense of burden from the things you believe you are expected to do.

If you are doing something because you feel like you have to, or it is expected, or you expect to get something out of it, then you can sense that task as a burden.

You will become weary physically, emotionally and spiritually.

But that is not what Jesus is talking about here.

He is envisioning another motivation for taking up His cause and that would be appreciation, thanksgiving, and joy for what He has already done for you.

Your relationship with Jesus takes on another dimension when you think of doing what you are called to do from this perspective.

Jesus calls you to be yoked with him, to take up His cause in word and deed and He calls us to be yoked together, unified, all of us, working together with one purpose, His purpose.

It is Christ himself who is the yoke that binds us together. It is in Christ that we will find our rest.

With all that goes on in our world you may find it difficult to imagine where or how, but it does happen; and it happens here.

It happens when we come together again and again to hear the Word of God proclaimed, to give thanks for all God has done in Christ Jesus,

and to receive, touch, and taste the Word of God shared as we gather around the sacred meal of bread and wine, grace and acceptance.

You who are weary come.

You who are carrying heavy burdens come and leave them here.

Know the joy of Christ's presence.

Go in peace then and serve the Lord.