

The Reverend Renee L. Fenner  
St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church  
5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 9/Year A  
July 9, 2017  
Text: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

“Carrying the Yoke Together”

I may have told this story before but it is worth repeating.

*There is a Hindu story about a disciple who said to the master, “How can I find God?” Instead of answering the question, the master led the student down to the river. After staring out over the water a few minutes, the master grabbed the student and pushed his head under the water, holding him there for several minutes while the student struggled to get free. Finally the master let him go and the student emerged from the water sputtering and gasping for air.*

*After a few minutes, the master smiled and said, “So how did it feel down there?” The student stared angrily at the master and replied. “It was awful. I thought I was going to die.” The Master smiled again and said, “When you want God as much as you wanted air, when you feel like you cannot live without God in your life; then you will find God. Or rather, then you will realize God has already found you.”*

Have you ever noticed that there are always some people who are never satisfied or happy with anything? No matter the place or time or circumstance, things are seldom ‘right’ and no matter how hard we may try-it is never enough.

Jesus found himself at a point of frustration in this morning’s gospel. He and his disciples had been busy preaching and teaching in synagogues villages and hillsides, exorcizing demons, and curing all kinds of ills. Crowds would often find him and follow him hoping for words of comfort in their often troubled lives but still, there were always those who just could not accept him despite all they had seen and heard. And so he says:

*“But 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.’*

It almost as if he were saying, ‘What more can I do? Turn cartwheels?’ Even for some that would not have been enough.

But he wasn’t the first person that people didn’t accept. They also rejected his cousin, John the Baptizer, who now awaited his fate in prison. Neither of these messengers fit what they wanted.

John was seen as someone other than who he really was and not as the greatest prophet ever born, at least in Jesus’ eyes. To some who encountered him, he was a demon possessed lunatic whose outward appearance and diet were off-putting. And then there was Jesus who laughed and welcomed all matter of people. He was not afraid to eat and drink and speak with those whom others deemed unclean or outside of the community. Needless to say, the people expected more from someone supposed to be their long awaited messiah. They were expecting a leader who would drive out the Romans with military might-not one who preached loving their enemies.

But neither John nor Jesus cared what they thought. Both knew his role and purpose. Both knew that they were to announce God’s kingdom and to help others to draw closer to Him. Jesus knew that he was the One sent by God and the One who would set his people free-free from all earthly rulers and the over-zealous teachers, like the scribes and Pharisees who burdened the people down with their own righteousness and transformed the life-giving Torah into a heavy burden, making law after law, and long lists of expectations of how others must live down to the last T. And all they did was to transform God into a God of their own choosing, a God made in their own image and not the God in whose image they were created.

The human condition has not changed all that much throughout the centuries and just as in Jesus’ day many often find themselves burdened under myriads of laws, regulations, illusions of control, and real and unrealistic expectations. There are those spoken and unspoken demands of our jobs, families, peers, and society. We are often struggle with the notion that we must prove ourselves and be more and do more, and have more. We are often restless, never really feeling fulfilled, always looking for the next best thing. We struggle within ourselves as Paul did when he wrote: “*I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very things I hate.*” And thus we go round and round in a cycle of guilt and failure and unworthiness. And we constantly bombarded with news of a world that has by and large, gone mad. Ugh!!!!!!

And this is when we take Jesus' words to heart:

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

*“Come to me.”* Not to more rules or expectations, but “to me”-Jesus himself.

Come to me, all you that are weary. Come to me, all you who are carrying heavy yokes-yokes that make you feel like you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders. Come to me if you are burdened by illness and whatever else ails you. Come to me when others try to define you and control you. Come to me when you do not know which way to turn. Come to me and learn how to live lightly and freely. Come to me, if you are truly seeking the God of love and goodness, for God has already found you.

My friends, Jesus calls us to himself so that he can walk life's journey with us. And he is willing to share our yokes to help lighten our loads. We need not go through life alone.

[“Plenty of us labor under the illusion that our yokes are single ones, that we have got to go it alone, that the only way to please God is to load ourselves down with heavy requirements-good deeds, pure thoughts, blameless lives, perfect obedience-all those rules we make and break and make and break (and make and break some more), while all the time] Jesus is standing right there in front of us, half of a shared yoke across his own shoulders, the other half wide open and waiting for us, a yoke that requires no more than that we step into it and become part of a team.”\*

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

This our Savior's promise to us. For when we walk with him, we will indeed, find God and God's grace and peace and rest for our souls.

Amen!

*\*The Open Yoke: Matthew 11:25-30*, taken from The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew, by Barbara Brown Taylor