

Sunday, July 5, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today's gospel reading contains iconic words from Jesus: "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" (Matthew 11:28-30).

In this invitation, Jesus offers a yoke to tired listeners and tells them that a yoke will give them rest. The yoke as a means to rest was a strange idea for the disciples. A yoke as a means to rest ought to sound strange to us, as well. The early hearers of this biblical passage would have known a yoke to be a means of engaging the energy of oxen as heavy lifters in the enterprise of farming. Yokes are still employed in our world and they are still a burden and a way of harnessing animal's hard work, especially in places where people don't have access to the internal combustion engine. The first ancient readers or hearers of Matthew also viewed a yoke as a symbol of obedience to God's law and wisdom.

Generally, our instinct is to resist yokes *and* laws, or at least not immediately connect them with the idea of freedom. Through the image of the yoke, however, Jesus invites us to think of God's law and wisdom as a means to surrender, give way, and accept something graceful and positive—rest, ease, lightness. Jesus reframes the idea of a yoke by telling us that a yoke will help us grow as disciples. The gospel links humility to freedom.

### **Let Us Be Gathered**

#### **Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,  
who forgives all our sin,  
whose mercy endures forever.  
Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God.  
*Silence is kept for reflection.*

Most merciful God,  
we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.  
We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.  
Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,  
so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy,  
loved us even when we were dead in sin,  
and made us alive together with Christ.  
By grace you have been saved.

In the name of † Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.  
Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit,  
that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.  
Amen.

#### **Gathering Song**

Our gathering song for this Sunday is "Let the Whole Creation Cry" (ELW #876). Our singing is led by Bellevue Presbyterian Church in Bellevue, Washington, through a recording from 2016.

Here is the video link: <https://vimeo.com/156183785>. Words are included in the video.

## **Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray.

You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised.

You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.

Grant that we may believe in you, call upon you, know you, and serve you,  
through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

## **Let Us Hear God's Word**

### **A reading from Zechariah:**

<sup>9</sup>Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup>He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war-horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

his dominion shall be from sea to sea,

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

<sup>11</sup>As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

<sup>12</sup>Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;

today I declare that I will restore to you double. (Zechariah 9)

*The Word of the Lord.*

*Thanks be to God.*

### **A reading from the Psalms:**

<sup>8</sup>The Lord is gracious and full of compassion,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup>Lord, you are good to all,

and your compassion is over all your works.

<sup>10</sup>All your works shall praise you, O Lord,

and your faithful ones shall bless you.

<sup>11</sup>They shall tell of the glory of your kingdom

and speak of your power,

<sup>12</sup>that all people may know of your power

and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

<sup>13</sup>Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages.

You, Lord, are faithful in all your words, and loving in all your works.

<sup>14</sup>The Lord upholds all those who fall

and lifts up those who are bowed down. (Psalm 145)

### **A reading from Romans:**

<sup>15</sup>I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup>So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup>but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup>Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25a</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7)

*Word of God. Word of life.*

*Thanks be to God.  
The holy gospel according to Matthew.  
Glory to you, O Lord.*

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] <sup>16</sup>“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

<sup>17</sup>‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup>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.”

<sup>25</sup>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; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>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.

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11)

*The Gospel of the Lord.  
Praise to you, O Christ.*

### **Reflection on the Readings**

“Prisoners of hope.”

“For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

“I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.”

It’s *Catch-22*. It’s paradox. It’s illogical. Each of our readings today seems to bring contradiction and absurdity to the forefront. It’s not supposed to be so difficult on a holiday weekend.

Yokes are not about taking a rest. They are about bearing heavy loads.

Liberty should not bind us to doing things we hate.

Hope should not make us a prisoner.

And yet this exactly where we and our neighbors find ourselves in the year 2020.

We hope to be free of the virus which brings COVID-19. To find and arrive at that hope, we must bind ourselves to new habits, new patterns, and new practices of health safety that can feel imprisoning.

On this weekend, we remember the Declaration of Independence and its pronouncement that all “are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” And yet we often overlook the following words, “That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” We can find ourselves hating that our national liberty is not one of personal independence but rather one of mutual, communal, and civic responsibility. The Declaration ends with this promise: “We mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

And yokes—well, aren’t those only in museums these days? Or maybe on remote Amish farms? Why should anyone share the burden of someone else’s heavy load? Take responsibility for yourself. Rest should be about “me time,” right? It shouldn’t be about more work.

Writing 500 years ago this year, in 1520, Martin Luther didn’t offer much relief from the *catch-22* situation. In his treatise *The Freedom of a Christian*, Luther summarizes our experience in this way: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” Talk about a contradicting paradox!

Luther clearly recognized the challenging aspects of his message when he acknowledged that there are very many who, when they hear of freedom of faith, immediately turn it into an occasion to do whatever they want. “Finally,” he states, “something must be added for the sake of those for whom nothing can be said so well that they will not spoil it by misunderstanding it. It is questionable whether

they will understand even what will be said here. They want to show that they are free men and Christians only by despising and finding fault with [everything else].”

1520 suddenly seems not so distant in time from 2020.

But in this year of challenges and daunting stress, more than ever, we can recognize that we are not meant to live as isolated individuals who are in complete control. That is not where a right to freedom leads. In offering us his yoke, the lesson Jesus desires us to understand is the requirement that we surrender our independent points of view and become vulnerable and dependent on God. Freed in that faith, we find Jesus ready and willing to help us each carry our burdens.

It’s just that Jesus does not offer to help us in the way most of us want. After all, when we are carrying a heavy weight, our desire may be for Jesus simply to take the weight away. What we desire, though, and what we need are not necessarily the same things—and God’s concern is for our needs.

So, in counterintuitive and counter-cultural fashion, we are not promised that the load will be removed. Instead, Jesus urges us to trust him and place a different weight on our shoulders: his yoke. With faith in a God who knows our needs and helps carry our loads, we end up with a benefit that lightens our heavy loads and refreshes our souls.

Because we do not see many yokes around these days, we may forget that a yoke—a wooden bar or frame that joins two animals together so they can pull a heavy load—is not only something that is meant for two, but something that was used by farmers to train inexperienced animals for their work. Less experienced beasts of burden would be teamed with more experienced ones so that the rookie ox could learn how to pull the weight of the plow. (See a small glimpse of the story of new oxen just beginning four years of training at Iowa’s Living History Farms here: <https://www.lhf.org/2015/01/training-new-oxen/>.)

Jesus knows our yoke. Through him, we are being trained as baptized children of God—and of the rest that comes when we work with him. Through faith, we are partnered with Jesus and taught how to balance and maneuver what is at hand, with the help of one who is more seasoned in the tasks associated with living. Within this yoke of Jesus, we are trained to know the humility of true freedom and true liberty and the mutual, communal service that necessarily flows from that freedom and liberty. Within this yoke of mutual service, Jesus brings us to life, revelation, and grace.

### **Hymn of the Day**

From Elizabeth City in North Carolina, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church musicians lead us today in singing “I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say” (ELW #611). Enjoy the banjo lift to the music as we walk together through these trav’ling days in Jesus’ yoke!

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/4Ui79IKS40w>.

- 1        *I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
          “Come unto me and rest;  
          lay down, O weary one, lay down  
          your head upon my breast.”  
          I came to Jesus as I was,  
          so weary, worn, and sad;  
          I found in him a resting-place,  
          and he has made me glad.*
- 2        *I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
          “Behold, I freely give  
          the living water, thirsty one;  
          stoop down and drink and live.”  
          I came to Jesus, and I drank  
          of that life-giving stream;  
          my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
          and now I live in him.*
- 3        *I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
          “I am this dark world’s light;  
          look unto me, your morn shall rise,*

*and all your day be bright.”  
I looked to Jesus, and I found  
in him my star, my sun;  
and in that light of life I’ll walk  
till trav’ling days are done.*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

We pray for the church around the globe. Where Christians are assembling for worship, protect them from viral infection. Where Christians are worshiping with print and screen, grant them steadfastness in your word. Strengthen those believers who doubt your goodness. Bless pastors, deacons, and committee members as they serve our congregations in this difficult time.

*A brief silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray for the well-being of creation. Grant renewal to the air, the waters, and the lands. Save the animals whose natural habitat is threatened by climate change or human carelessness, and direct us toward sustainable living. Preserve the fields of Kenya from locusts. Nourish our country’s green spaces.

*A brief silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray for the nations. Keep the world from war. Pave the way for just elections. Protect citizens from the designs of autocratic rulers. Uphold our courts. Guide our national and state governments in finding ways to redress the wrongs of racism and to ensure equality for all.

*A brief silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray for those who are sick and suffering. Console the fearful, feed the hungry, house the homeless, shelter the run-aways. Heal the many who are newly afflicted with the coronavirus, and guide researchers in discovering a vaccine. Visit the sick, especially Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we name before you now.

*A brief silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray for infants and young children, that they be carefully tended. We pray for teens, that they keep patience throughout the contagion. We pray for school boards and education administrators, that they find solutions for the fall semester. We pray for the unemployed, that they find jobs. We pray for medical workers, that they remain healthy. We pray for the aged, especially those in care facilities, that they find companionship in your presence.

*A brief silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray finally for ourselves. Show us that the yoke of faith is easy; may we find our rest in you. Hear now our private petitions.

*A longer time of silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

We give thanks for those who have died in faith. Comfort all who mourn their dead, and at the end, bring us and all your people into your eternal rest.

*A time of silence.*

O God, you are gracious and full of compassion: in mercy, receive our prayer.

Receive these prayers, O God, for the sake of him who bore the heavy yoke for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Please continue to remember and support the ongoing ministries of our church during this time. As we begin the second half of this calendar year of 2020, we do so knowing that Christ alone sets us free to share his yoke. Offerings may be sent to Peace Lutheran Church, 3100 N St Louis Ave, Joplin MO 64801.

## Offering Prayer

Merciful God,  
as grains of wheat scattered upon the hills  
were gathered together to become one bread,  
so let your church be gathered together  
from the ends of the earth into your kingdom,  
for yours is the glory through Jesus Christ, now and forever.  
Amen.

## Let Us Be Sent in Service

### Sending Song

Bryan Odeen is back with us again this week to lead us in today's sending song, "Light Dawns on a Weary World" (ELW #726).

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/6BXgog-XEDE>.

1     *Light dawns on a weary world  
      when eyes begin to see  
      all people's dignity.  
      Light dawns on a weary world:  
      the promised day of justice comes.*

#### *Refrain*

*The trees shall clap their hands;  
the dry lands, gush with springs;  
the hills and mountains shall break forth with singing!  
We shall go out in joy,  
and be led forth in peace,  
as all the world in wonder echoes shalom.*

2     *Love grows in a weary world  
      when hungry hearts find bread  
      and children's dreams are fed.  
      Love grows in a weary world:  
      the promised feast of plenty comes. Refrain*

3     *Hope blooms in a weary world  
      when creatures, once forlorn,  
      find wilderness reborn.  
      Hope blooms in a weary world:  
      the promised green of Eden comes. Refrain*

### Sending Prayer

Let us pray.  
Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever.  
Amen.

### Benediction

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord's face shine on us with grace and mercy.  
The Lord look upon us with favor and ☩ give us peace.  
Amen.