



**Northeastern
Ohio Synod**

God's work. Our hands.

NEOS Summer Sabbath Sermon Series

July 9, 2023

Lectionary 14, Year A

Pastor Julianne Smith

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

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] 16“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.’

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

25At 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; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All 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. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Sermon Text

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

A group of South Dakota high school students once typed the Declaration of Independence into a manuscript form as a project to celebrate the nation’s Bicentennial in 1976. They stripped it of its parchment appearance, removed from it the old English type, made copies of it, and circulated them as petitions around the community. Fifty percent of those approached refused to sign it. It was “Un-American.”

It makes me wonder, if someone reworked the language of the Ten Commandments, would they also be rejected? Would people say those aren’t Biblical? The current cultural climate in our nation suggests that they might be considered too radical.

This rejection of what is God’s is nothing new. Our Gospel passage for today reveals that Jesus and John the Baptist were also encountering people who wanted to reject them because they didn’t match the public’s expectations of a prophet or a savior. John appeared to have a demon and Jesus wasn’t holy enough!

This entire eleventh chapter from Matthew’s gospel reflects how people were responding to Jesus and what He had to say about them. You might want to read through it all, including the passage that was omitted today. There Jesus offers a reproach to the cities in which most of his

deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. He even included his hometown of Capernaum! I think that these words of reproach make the words of comfort at the end of this chapter all the more appreciated.

Remember, Matthew's gospel is less about the promise of salvation by grace through faith, and more about what to do once you're aware of God's grace in your life. Matthew's focus is on how to be all that God calls you to be. It is about how to be a better person for Christ's sake. Still, the promise of grace is clearly present, as witnessed by today's words. 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."

Whenever I hear these words, I feel great joy. Here we have the promise from Jesus that we will find rest for our souls. Here we find the tenderness and comfort that is often missing in Matthew. It is a thrill to know that Jesus desires to give us comfort and rest. It is a wonder to realize that while Jesus will not remove the burden from us, Jesus changes the way we deal with our burdens.

I didn't always feel that way about this passage. My grandfather was the manager of the dairy in my hometown. It was called Dairy Maid. On the side of its cartons was the picture of a "dairy maid" bearing on her shoulders a yoke, a wooden bar, with a pail of milk hanging from each side. Didn't look very comfortable to me.

For years, whenever I read this passage from Matthew, I pictured this sort of yoke as the type that Jesus was asking us to wear- on our own. I imagined Jesus was asking us to carry his "burden" by ourselves. And for the life of me, I couldn't understand why there would be much comfort or ease in that sort of burden. I was still the one toting it!

Then, someone reminded me that the sort of yoke that Jesus was describing most likely was the type used by farmers with a team of oxen. That yoke would only work if there was a team of oxen. And, that the yoke was made to fit that particular team of oxen. It then occurred to me that instead of a single yoke being plopped onto any of our shoulders, leaving us on our own, Jesus is inviting us to become yoked with Him. Jesus is promising us that regardless of what burdens we bear, that He is bearing that load with us. This is what makes our burdens light. This is what gives our souls rest.

What joy there is in knowing that Jesus is yoked with us! What relief and peace to know that Jesus is matching us step for step in order to bring us rest! This gives me great joy. Now I understand that Jesus does not take away from me problems or struggles but is there with me – yoked with me and making it possible for me to persevere. This is a promise given not only to the individual who trusts in God's grace, but also to the Church who proclaims Christ's death and resurrection as the salvation for the world. It is the promise which is mirrored in Jesus' last words to his disciples: I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Consider this story: A man was lost while driving through the county. (must have been pre-GPS) As he tried to read a map, he drove off the road into a ditch. Though he wasn't injured, his car was stuck deep in the mud. So the man walked to a nearby farm to ask for help. "Warwick can get you out of that ditch," said the farmer, pointing to an old mule standing in the field. The man looked at the haggardly mule and looked at the farmer who just stood there repeating, "Yep, Warwick can do the job." The man figured he had nothing to lose. The two people and Warwick made their way back to the ditch.

The farmer hitched the mule to the car. With a snap of the reins she shouted, "Pull Fred! Pull Jack! Pull Ted! Pull Warwick!" And the mule pulled the car from the ditch with very little effort.

The man was amazed. He thanked the farmer, patted the mule, and asked, "Why did you call out all of those other names before you called Warwick?" The farmer grinned and said, "Old Warwick is just about blind. As long as he believes he's part of a team, he doesn't mind pulling." We know that we are part of a team, and that team includes Jesus. We can press on, knowing that we are not alone.

Still, there are many people who read this promise from Jesus of a light burden and an easy yoke, and assume that it means that all the worries of the world will disappear with Jesus at our side. That is not what Jesus is promising. And others assume that a light burden means they are not required to become involved in the issues of the world.

As Christians we know that it is not that way. Instead of being removed from the world's issues, we are placed right in the middle of them. Instead of being able to ignore our siblings we are to be Christ-like and help them bear their burdens. It is a sad but true reality that many people leave the fellowship of the church when they are faced with the discovery that life in Christ is rarely a peaceful rose garden, but often includes thorns. Actually, even a rose garden requires work to keep it looking beautiful.

To be involved with Christ's mission and ministry, to be yoked with Christ, may mean encountering hardship and difficulty along the way. It will certainly mean encountering others who are also yoked with Christ and being a part of a team greater than we could ever imagine. When we are working with Christ on our team, all things are possible.

Perhaps that is the paradox of the Christian faith. Even as we are the ones who receive comfort and assurance from Jesus, we are also the ones who are prodded and pressed on to do God's purpose. That changes the question doesn't it? Instead of asking "What's in it for me?" when we encounter a situation, we find ourselves asking, What does Jesus want done?

What does Jesus want done for those who enter our country seeking asylum? What does Jesus want done with weapons of mass destruction? What does Jesus want done for the person who stops by our church building looking for help with rent, or food, or gas? What does Jesus want done with our church endowment fund, or our own funds? I know, now I'm getting personal.

This is the question we can ask ourselves in whatever situation we encounter: What does Jesus want done? Since we are wearing Jesus' yoke, since we are yoked with Jesus, since we are part of the team with Jesus, then through prayer, study, and conversation, we can come to know the answers Jesus wants us to have. We can step forward knowing that we are walking with Jesus, and Jesus is walking with us.

When we are weary and tired, and feeling broken, it is good to know that we are yoked with Jesus. When our souls are rested and we are ready to work, it is good to know we are yoked with Jesus. Whatever our situation is, it is good to know, we are yoked with Jesus and Jesus is yoked with us. Amen.