

The Yoke's on Us
Matthew 11:28-30
Sunday, July 5, 2020
Beargrass Christian Church

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Before COVID a class was learning some American history.
 - 1. Their teacher taught the children some songs.
 - 2. She helped them memorize the Pledge of Allegiance.
 - 3. She invited parents to come to a short program at the school.
 - 4. And the children did remarkably well—except for one little guy who came up with some creative alternatives for the words.
 - 5. At the end of the pledge he said: “And to the republic for which it stands...one naked...individual...under God...”
 - 6. (Maybe he was thinking about Adam and Eve?)
 - 7. He also made a logical mistake with a song: “Stand beside her and guide her, through the night with the light from a bulb.”
- B. Anyway, I hope you are having a meaningful 4th of July weekend.
- C. Today we continue to make our way through the middle of Matthew, which focuses on the demands of discipleship.
 - 1. If you have read all of chapter 11—you know it is pretty rough!
 - 2. It seems that Jesus is having a bad day and needs a vacation.
 - 3. He “loses” it—and lets loose on those around him!
 - 4. It is not one of Jesus’ shining moments, is it?
- D. But then something surprising happens!
 - 1. Right after he gives a glimpse of his fatigue and frustration, he offers some of the most beloved words we have ever heard!
 - 2. “Come to me, all who are weary and who are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”
 - a. “Take my yoke upon you.”
 - b. “For my yoke is easy...and my burden is light.”

II. SO...WHAT BURDENS ARE YOU CARRYING?

- A. I suspect we all have some right now—perhaps many?
- B. For instance, sometimes religion becomes a burden.
 - 1. This may have been the burden Jesus is describing.
 - 2. Later in Matthew 23 he complains about the way religious leaders are placing heavy burdens on people’s backs.
 - 3. He knows that religious practices can sometimes get reduced to a legalistic system of “musts,” “oughts,” and “shoulds.”
 - 4. You probably know folks who are still trying to get over the damage done to them in the name of a burdensome “religion.”
 - 5. Some churches offer way too much “R & R”—and that is not rest and relaxation—it is rules and regulations.
- C. Some of us are carrying burdens we thought were blessings.
 - 1. We may have the burden of financial stress?
 - 2. “Take 10 years of payments upon you, for my yoke is easy.”
 - 3. At times we are victims of a revolt from out “conveniences.”

4. We bought this stuff to free us, to unburden our lives.
5. How ironic it is that we end up servicing our stuff?
6. "I wait for the technician to arrive, therefore I am."
- D. Some of you have other heavy burdens—relationship issues, work—or lack of it, money—or lack of it, health challenges, significant losses...
- E. Do you have concerns about the community, country and world?
- F. A headline made me laugh—and almost cry—at the same time.
 1. It read: "The Happiest Place on Earth is Closed."
 2. You can probably guess what the story was about.
 3. Disney World and Disneyland have been shut down.
 4. Mickey Mouse loves to say: "See ya real soon!"
 5. Well, maybe this week in Florida...maybe not in California?
- G. Speaking of happy, polls indicate that Americans are not—we are the unhappiest we have been in 50 years—another time when civil rights and justice were a great concern.
 1. This year has been rough on the American psyche.
 2. Around 50% say they feel isolated and alone.
 3. And most of the new survey's interviews were done before the senseless deaths we have seen in far too many cities—and which keep happening.
 4. These have touched off nationwide protests and global conversations.
 5. They have added to the feelings of stress and loneliness Americans were already facing from the COVID outbreak.
- H. One woman confessed to feeling anxious and depressed.
 1. She lost her job and had to move back home to stay with her family.
 2. Her cat died...and then her father passed away...then the pandemic hit.
 3. She said: "It's been one thing after another. This is very hard."
 4. "After so much...I don't know what's going to happen."

III. **SO...WHERE CAN WE FIND SOME HELP?**

- A. Jesus says: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you."
- B. Doesn't that sound comforting and reassuring?
 1. But wait a minute—did Jesus say "yoke?!"
 2. Burdened, burned-out people need a break—not a yoke!
 3. A yoke is a work-instrument used to help oxen pull together.
 4. Jesus says: "Are you burdened? Well here, let me strap this four by four by eight across your back and see if that helps."
 5. Instead of an escape, Jesus offers some new equipment.
 6. A burden, a yoke...this has to be a joke?!
- C. But perhaps it is a special kind of equipment?
 1. A scholar offers an enlightening description of Jesus' yoke.
 2. The word "easy" in Greek can mean "well-fitting."
 3. The yoke was roughed out and carefully adjusted and readjusted so that it would fit well and not give the beast a pain in the neck.
 4. There is a legend that in his carpenter's shop in Nazareth, Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all of Galilee.
 5. When Jesus says, "My yoke is easy," he may have been using an illustration from his years of working in the wood shop.

6. He says: "The life I give you is not a burden to bruise you; your task, your mission in life has been tailor-made to fit you."
 7. Jesus offers us a chance to unburden—but it is not complete deliverance from responsibility or accountability.
- D. On this 4th of July weekend when talk of freedom is in the air, some folks think that real freedom is the absence of responsibility.
1. For some it means all constraints are gone—"I can do my thing without any regard to the effect it has on anybody around me!"
 2. Painful examples of the abuse of freedom have been seen in crimes, the destruction of property, and violence.
 3. Deep in our hearts we know that kind of freedom is faulty.
 4. It can lead to selfishness, moral bankruptcy, and misery.
- E. Examples abound on the federal, state, and local level.
1. Rules are made to protect public health and the common good.
 2. To mask or not to mask, to distance or not to distance, to isolate or not isolate, to open or not to open...these are the questions that are before us...
 3. But folks go ballistic about losing any of their liberties!
 4. As people of faith are we to use liberty to do whatever we want?
 5. Or do we use it to choose compassion, justice and love?

IV. CAN WE OFFER HELP AND HOPE TO EACH OTHER?

- A. Jesus knows that the issue is not "if" we will be burdened.
1. If we are alive, we will be burdened—that is part of the deal.
 2. But we have some freedom to choose the burdens we will bear.
 3. Jesus offers a yoke that brings meaning and purpose to our lives.
 4. Hopefully, we will be yoked—to him and to each other.
 5. We literally need to come together...to pull together.
 6. A hymn says: "Make me a captive, Lord; then I shall be free!"
 7. We are to have burdens worth bearing and yokes worth wearing.
- B. We may be feeling anxious, angry, or exhausted right now.
1. But surveys also indicate that many people are feeling hopeful and optimistic about the future.
 2. Some see these challenging times as a chance for progress and change.
- C. I appreciate this perspective from Robert Love.
1. He says: "This 4th of July we are urged to strike a balance between personal freedom and the health of our fellow Americans."
 2. "July 4th is the midpoint of the year, the pivot upon which the seasons turn, the start of high summer."
 3. "It is perhaps the most American of our holidays—it is a celebration of our Founders' boldness and bravery."
 4. "In that steamy Philadelphia summer of 1776, they adopted—unanimously—the Declaration of Independence."
 5. "The document presented to a curious world the best case ever made for humanity's inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—it is our nation's birth certificate."
- D. I had not thought about the Declaration in that way before.
1. But if it is our nation's birth certificate all of our names are on it.

2. If we yoke our faith and the Declaration together then all lives matter—and all have a right to life, liberty, and happiness.
3. A line in that song I mentioned earlier is also a prayer for God’s light to guide us—that light also helps us see the truth.
4. We have come to see that we are not well—we are unhealthy.
 - a. The imperfect storms of COVID, unemployment, and isolation have given many of us more time to reflect and respond.
 - b. We have come to realize that some things are just not right.
 - c. More folks have had more time for meaningful conversations, sustained protests—more know that we all have fallen short when it comes to racism.
 - d. There has been a progressive revelation...an awakening...about this issue.
 - e. So, because all lives matter, black lives really do matter.
5. That is a primary focus right now—and there is much work yet to be done—but there are others...
 - a. Because all lives matter, Hispanic lives matter.
 - b. Because all lives matter, LGBTQ+ lives matter.
 - c. Because all lives matter, Asian, Indian and Native American lives matter.
 - d. Because all lives matter, young and old lives matter.
 - e. Because all lives matter, women’s lives matter.
 - f. Because all lives matter, white lives matter.
 - g. Because all lives matter, children’s lives matter.
 - h. Because all lives matter, men’s lives matter.
 - i. Because all lives matter, broken lives matter.
 - j. Because God so loved the world, all lives matter.
6. Wow! This is sounding a lot like Acts 2 again, Amen?!
7. This is the power of the “Pentecost Effect”—everyone matters!
8. We are called to work together for everyone’s inalienable rights.
- E. Friends, I am not sure what kind of burdens you are bearing today.
 1. But Jesus wants you to free—free to be the person God created you to be, free to say no or yes, free to be who you are...
 2. No matter what other people or the world have to say.
 3. We are invited to take up the plans and purposes of God.
 4. This is freedom—to know we are loved—and to love others.
 5. There is good news for us today...
 6. The yoke of Jesus...and the Spirit of the living, liberating God are upon us!
 7. Thanks be to God. Amen.