



THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JULY 5, 2020

MATTHEW 11: 16-19; 25-30

"YOKED"

"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.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 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.

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; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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. "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."

SERMON

I figure we all are a little weary. Weary of staying home. Weary of wearing face masks when we go out. Weary of using hand sanitizer and washing our hands for two rounds of *happy birthday*. Weary of social distancing. Weary of the politicizing of health concerns. Weary of the burden of what we might consider personal sacrifices.



This past weekend, large numbers of people in Arizona said the hell with it and headed out to float down the salt river. **(photo)**

In the face of being asked to make personal sacrifices, largely for the sake of others, Americans flock to bars and churches, beaches, and retail stores. Even as the number of cases rise in states that refused to flatten the curve, many Americans refuse to make any sacrifice....

I was curious. President trump has stated that we are in a war with this pandemic. I thought, what did Americans do when asked to make sacrifices in world war ii?

Well, when the united states declared war after the attack on pearl harbor, the government created a system of rationing, limiting the amount of certain goods that a person could purchase. Supplies such as gasoline, butter, sugar, and canned milk were rationed. War disrupted trade, limiting the availability of some goods. The Japanese controlled the Dutch west indies, creating a shortage of rubber that affected American production.

In august, 1941, President Roosevelt created **the office of price administration**, whose job it was to place a ceiling on prices of most goods and to limit consumption by rationing.

Americans received their first ration card in May, 1942. The first card became known as the *Sugar Book* for one of the commodities Americans could purchase with their ration card. Automobiles, tires, fuel oil, coal, firewood, nylon, silk, and shoes were all rationed. Americans used their ration cards and stamps to take



their **meager share** of household staples, including meat, dairy, coffee, dried fruits, jams, jellies, lard, shortening and oils.

Americans learned, as they did in the great depression, to do without. **Sacrificing certain items became the norm.** It was considered a **common good** for the war effort and **it affected every American household.**

Would you consider it harsh of me to conclude that, today, the only things many Americans are willing to sacrifice are their intellects, their compassion, the common good of the nation, care of the neighbor, and regard for anyone other than themselves?

Perhaps many of you are too young to remember Nikkita Khrushchev' famous statement: "We do not need to invade the united states. We will destroy them from within."

Left to our own devices, we are doing a pretty good job....

Historically, four character traits have been seen as cardinal virtues:

Wisdom. That is, the ability to discern the appropriate course of action in a given situation at the appropriate time.

Courage, defined as strength, endurance, and the ability to confront fear, uncertainty, and intimidation

Temperance, an old term meaning **restraint**, the practice of self-control, discretion, and moderation.

Plato considered temperance, which he called **soundmindedness**, to be the most important virtue.



Justice, as in fairness or, in biblical terms, righteousness.

Any person with any degree of wisdom can look at the daily news and conclude that many Americans, including some of our political leaders, some of our religious leaders, and some of our citizens are sorely lacking in these cardinal virtues.

Yes, we can respond to our weariness by refusing to wear masks and refusing to social distance.

Yes, we can respond to any weariness over remaining at home by heading to the bars, beaches, restaurants, and churches.

Yes, we can respond to our weariness by ranting and raving about our rights and our freedoms which, in the face of our ancestors who sacrificed during world war ii, seems pathetic and narcissistic.

Yes, we can respond by morphing into Karens and Kens....

But, how are we, as people of faith, to handle our weariness?

Jesus acknowledges that weariness is a common human experience: “come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.”



The eternal Christ speaks to us in our contemporary situation: **we are weary. We are all carrying heavy burdens.**

And rather than just thinking of our own burdens, think of one another's burdens:

Those who are confined to nursing homes or prisons.

Those who are fighting terminal illnesses.

Those who are struggling to pay rent or to put food on the table.

Those who have no family.

Think of families with both parents working from home and caring for children.

Those who are unemployed.

Those who struggle to maintain sobriety or remain straight, often without any twelve-step meetings.

What is the spiritual answer?

"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 light."

Unless we grew up on an Amish farm, we likely have no experience with a yoke.

In ancient times, farmers used a yoke—a kind of wooden collar fitted onto the neck—linking two oxen together—who would then equally pull whatever burden was attached to the plow.

St. Paul will later speak of two oxen being unequally yoked, so that they cannot perform the task set before them. They are at odds with one another.



This is not the image Jesus sets before us. If our burden is heavy, the burden of Jesus is easy and light. Yoked to Jesus, we equally carry our burden with the lord of the universe. The load is evened out or distributed fairly. We work as a team—as partners—as allies—as buddies.

How does this work?

By being soulful.

Being soulful has to do with a perspective on life. It is cultivating a reflective, imaginative lens through which we view life.

Soulmaking, which the poet, Keats, says is the purpose of the world, has to do with our being drawn to and looking deeply at the images given to us that then give our life meaning and depth.

Simply stated, soul imagines.

So I suggest that each morning, you arise from sleep and imagine being yoked to Jesus Christ. And that you carry this image soulfully with you each day. Over time, you will begin to experience the lightening of your load.

The yoke of Jesus is easy and light and you will find rest for your soul. Your heavy load will equal out with the light load of Jesus.



This is the Christlike spiritual response to our weariness.

But it is not even being followed by many churches.

What I hear most often from both political and religious leaders is fatalism under the guise of the economic freedom and the necessity of worship.

It goes like this:

Open up the states. Most people will get sick. Some will die, but that's the cost of economic survival and the freedom to practice our religion.

Sure, the people who die will largely be older adults or people with underlying health conditions, although a Pitt student, age 21, just died this week.

But hey, it is what it is.

Such a fatalistic perspective does not take into account the cost of each life lost.

Such a fatalistic approach consciously sets aside the Christian perspective of the innate value of each and every human life.

Why do you think God takes the human form of Jesus as both illegitimate and poor? Friend of the marginalized, the despised, the ostracized, the lowest of the low.



Often, the same people who will vehemently protect the life of an unborn child are the same people who essentially say “tough luck” to those who will die if we continue on the current course. Does this sound like a follower of Jesus?

Who among us are willing to give up our life?

For ultimately, the fatalist chooses death.

The follower of Jesus chooses life.

Those who pay special attention to the movement of the spirit of God in history suggest that the spirit first manifests in the people of Israel—a nation. Then manifests in a spiritual movement—Christianity, and now manifests in each individual.

This is a critical and difficult transition. Each of us, in a sense, asked to carry the challenge and burden of the incarnation of the spirit of God within us. This can be dangerous business.

So, to put it bluntly, we are being separated out. Those who are willing to be yoked to Jesus. To carry our burdens with the Christ beside us, pulling his own weight. And pulling our burden together.



And those who will insist that their immediate needs, the desires of their small egos, the freedoms of the small self are of ultimate importance.

Imagine.

Be soulful. You are yoked to Christ. He's beside you pulling that load with you. Be refreshed and renewed and enlivened.

“the word of God is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you may obey it. See, I have set before you today, life and prosperity, as well as death and disaster.”

Choose well.

SERMON SONG

I WISH YOU PEACE (THE EAGLES)