

Yoked with Jesus

July 6, 08

Mt 11: 16- 19; 25-30

#### SCRIPTURE INTRO:

Context for this reading from the gospel of Matthew is "unbelief"- John the Baptist, who is in jail, is doubting whether Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. At least he asks the question- tell me before I die- are you the one?

Both Jesus and John have preached that the kingdom of God is at hand. John has preached repentance, to prepare for the kingdom of God; Jesus has come with deed of power to show that the kingdom of God comes through him.

They both have their followers, But it's been hard to spread the word of God's kingdom beyond their immediate circles.

Jesus says, starting at chapter 11, verse 16,

#### YOKED WITH JESUS

Why was it so hard to spread the good news of God's kingdom? Why is it so hard? Life teaches us to be skeptical.

A seafood restaurant has written on the Specials Board "Big Lobster Tales, \$5 each."  
One customer is totally amazed and he says to the waitress, "\$5 each for lobster tails... is that really true?"

"Yes," she says, "It's our special just for today."

"Well, they must be little lobster tails."

"No," she replies, "They're really big!"

"Are you sure they aren't GREEN lobster tails... and a little bit TOUGH?"

"No," she says, "They are really big RED lobster tails."

"They must be OLD lobster tails!"

"No, they're definitely today's."

"Today's big red lobster tails... \$5 each?"

"Yes!"

"Well, here's my five dollars," he says, "I'll take one."

She takes the money, invites him to sit down at a table and then she sits down next to him, leans over close, and begins. "Once upon a time there was a really big red lobster..."

There's a reason we don't believe everything we're told. In the marketplace we don't expect to be told the truth. And Jesus generation was no different. They were as skeptical as we are of promises, political, economic, religious.

It's WISE to look for the holes in a proposal, in an argument, to be cautious, not to be taken in. This is marketplace savvy- seeing through the other person's tricks.

Jesus compares his generation to children in a marketplace, applying marketplace savvy to the kingdom promises that are being offered.

One group of children, he says, wants to play "funerals". They wail and mourn, but the others think that's a silly game and they don't join in. Well, let's play "weddings", say another group- so they play the flute and dance, but no, that's a silly game too. The others don't join in.

The children playing funerals are like John the Baptist and his followers- calling for repentance, for dying to the old ways, for turning to God in humility and contrition.

People look at John, they see the hair shirt, his diet of locusts, and they say, "this is not a well man" (or in first century lingo, he has a demon).

Those playing at weddings are like Jesus and his followers, the joy of new life just bursting through. People see the partying, the drinking, the dubious company, and they say, this cannot be a man of God!

The music plays, but people won't join the dance. They sit on the side and feel superior that they have seen through the sham. Something of that rings true for today's secular society, don't you think?

And perhaps for all of us in some degree, in that we tend to hold back our spiritual enthusiasm, we reserve judgment, we don't entirely throw ourselves into our faith.

A Sunday morning here and there, some scattered prayer through the week, but allow our lives to be totally transformed, to live to music completely different to the world's. Hmm. That might be seen to be foolish!

Jesus thanks God that the truth has been revealed not to the wise and the intelligent, but to infants.

An infant does not have marketplace skepticism. An infant just reaches out in trust and openness for what God offers, as though reaching for a mother's breast, or to be lifted into a father's arms. Infants are not suspicious. They respond simply out of their need for food and love.

Jesus appeals to our need for rest. "Come to me", he says, "you who are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

We could be skeptical about that. Is it possible in this world of struggle, strife, turmoil to have rest. We have to work to live. And life brings cares- burdens of worry for material things, for loved ones. Are we really going to believe that coming to Jesus will bring us rest?

Doesn't rest only come when we die, when we have eternal peace? Think of all the Requiems that have been written- prayers for the dead- may they rest in peace.

And yet, when we read today's scripture, we see clearly that Jesus offers us rest here and now, in THIS life. He invites us to take his yoke on us. He says his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

On the surface, it's not really an attractive offer- A yoke is the wooden frame, fitting over an ox's neck and shoulders, which enables the ox to pull a weight. Or a yoke might go over the shoulders of a slave. It's used to carry two heavy weights, each balancing the other.

Whatever, Jesus is not offering to carry our burdens, he's asking us to carry his! What is the burden, the weight that Jesus is hauling behind him, step by little step into this world?

Jesus carries a vision. A vision of a new world, with a new way of living. A world where no one lords it over another, where no one bears the yoke of domination and oppression.

A world where there is no judgment and condemnation, where each person is valued, accorded a place of worth, and all are included. It is a vision of a world where God's self giving love is manifest, where all things are shared with generosity and equity, where justice reigns and there is no poverty or violence.

Jesus hauls into this world this vision of a new way of living, symbolized by the cross that he drags as he exits this world, as he takes the first giant step in demonstrating this new way-

Of giving up power, of giving up judgment, of giving up everything that separates us from one another, an entirely new way of being, summed up in his description of himself in today's reading- gentle and humble in heart.

Jesus invites us to join him in carrying this vision. To choose HIS yoke, rather than the world's yoke; to choose to do the work of bringing in God's kingdom,. And we do need to choose.

We cannot serve two masters, we cannot bear two yokes. Yoked to the world, to the marketplace, we strive for more and more material things, for higher achievements and status, more and more security, and we suffer all the stress, the demands, and the anxiety that this brings.

Yoked to Jesus we take on a whole new goal and a whole new set of rules!  
Rather like entering a bike race; the gun goes off, we cycle like crazy to get to the finish line, only to discover the others are still near the starting line- the rules have been changed -the winner now is the one who can cover the least distance without falling off their bike!

We're yoked to Jesus in order to learn new rules for living. In Jesus' day, when two oxen were yoked together, it was customary to yoke a younger ox with an older, more experienced one, in order to teach the younger one what to do-

The bigger ox would carry the brunt of the weight. Jesus is comparing himself to a mentor ox, so to speak. It's an image where we work beside Jesus, allowing Jesus

to bear the weight and we learn from him- step by step. We learn to be like Jesus: gentle, and humble in heart.

To be yoked with Jesus is to have Jesus at one's side in all things. It's to pray in everything we do, and so to be open to Jesus showing us in everything how to be gentle, and humble.

Being yoked with Jesus is an image of staying very close to Jesus- through prayer, and so learning Jesus kingdom ways.

Max Lucado tells the story of the Song of the King., where three knights are all seeking the hand of a fair princess. ("Tell me the Secrets", pp28 – 30)  
The king devises a test. His daughter will marry the brave knight who is able to complete a journey through the dangerous Hemlock Forest.

The first knight is known for his strength, the second for his speed, and the third for alertness- seeing what others miss. To help the knights, the king will stand on the castle wall three times a day and play a melody on his flute. The music will drift into the forest as a beacon to guide the brave knights.

The only other flute of this kind belongs to the king's son.

It turns out that speed and strength are no match for the dangers of Hemlock Forest. Indeed the most treacherous aspect of the forest is that it is populated by Hopenots- small cunning creatures who can imitate the sound of the king's flute.

To the King's surprise, it is the third knight, Cassidon the wise, who completes the crossing. How did you succeed? The king asks.

Cassidon explains that he was able to navigate the dark forest because he chose the right traveling companion- the King's son, the prince, sat behind him and played the king's song in his ear. "Though a thousand flutes attempted to fool me, I knew your song," he says.

Choosing the right traveling companion, choosing to be yoked with Jesus yields the gift that God promises- even the gift of rest.. It's only by listening to God's song and learning to move to God's kingdom rhythms that we learn this truth.

We will never grasp it by applying our marketplace intelligence, and looking for the holes in what is offered. From the perspective of the marketplace we cannot evaluate a way of living that is so entirely different.

We will only know the truth of how much lighter Jesus way is, when we experience it, when we come to Jesus and take on our shoulders Jesus kingdom work, when we allow him to bear the weight, and we listen to his voice in our ear.

It's a life time process. Learning this new way of being. It begins by our saying "yes, I want to live in a new way," and our reaching for Jesus, as an infant reaches for what he or she needs.

And as we pray and listen, we will begin to see more clearly. Step by little step, our purposes will become God's purposes of justice, equity and peace. Step by little step, we will learn to live Jesus way of gentleness and humility. And we will find rest.

Yoked with Jesus, we know we have Jesus at our side. When troubles overwhelm us, when money is short, when love runs out, when health fails, when our suffering seems too much to bear, when our heart is breaking, when others judge and condemn us, we remember with whom we are yoked.

We allow Jesus to bear the weight, we listen to what he has to say; we watch for opportunities to be gentle and humble. We learn from Jesus. Step by little step.

And so we experience this lighter way, this way of rest that Jesus offers.

To God be all the praise the honour and the glory, Amen.

Let us stand as we're able and join in singing  
# 664 What a friend we have in Jesus

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord Jesus Christ,

We are carrying heavy burdens.

We carry burdens of pride, of judgment of others and ourselves,

Burdens of bitterness, of resentment,

Burdens of envy for what others have,

Burdens of striving to have things our own way.

We carry burdens of care for our material well being,

We are anxious that we will not have enough  
 We are anxious that we will lose what we have,  
 We worry about our health and the health of loved ones,  
 We worry about our children, our parents, our friends,  
 And in striving for all the good things our world offers,  
 We are busy and weary and worn.

Give us grace today, we pray,  
 to leave aside the burdens we have been carrying,  
 And give us the courage to take up the burden that you offer.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
 We come to you today as infants.  
 trusting to your goodness and power,  
 Wanting to learn from you  
 your kingdom ways  
 of gentleness and humility.

Grant us grace to turn to you in all things,  
 That you may teach us.  
 Open our ears to hear your voice.  
 We pray, lord God in the coming week,  
 That we may be aware of the opportunities you place before us  
 Opportunities to lay aside anger and be gentle;  
 Opportunities to lay aside pride and judgment,  
 And to be humble,  
 Opportunities to sow love rather than hatred,  
 To sow faith rather than fear  
 To sow hope rather than despair.

Lord God, hear now the prayers of our hearts,  
 As we bring to you in silence our personal concerns  
 For ourselves, for our loved ones,  
 for those named in the worship folder.....

We pray today especially for Leonora Obara  
 as she returns to Kenya and to her work with HIV/AIDS victims.  
 We pray lord God that the dreams you have placed in her heart  
 And in Andrew's heart may be realized-  
 The dream of taking in 20 orphans,  
 And we thank you, Lord God for the privilege of our church being  
 able to part of this dream.

We pray for the families in our city struggling with poverty,  
 Unable to feed their children,  
 Unable to pay for school supplies.  
 We pray for a great movement of hearts  
 And a shifting of wealth that will end this shame of poverty in our midst.

We pray Lord God that you may guide us all  
 in taking steps to make this world as you would have it be.

We pray that your will may be done in all things,  
Using the kingdom prayer that Jesus taught us pray, saying together,  
Our Father....

#### AFTER PRAYERS

Let us continue in prayer through the choir's ministry of music- you can find the words in  
More Voices 53.

#### AFTER CHOIR:

As we leave this place, we do not go alone.  
so let us join in singing together, VU 424, May the God of Hope go with Us.

#### COMMISSIONING

Put your hand in the hand of the Lord,  
And it will be as though you walked a known way and you will have all the light that you  
need.

God be with you,  
Amen.

Please stay for some refreshments and a time of friendship.

#### WELCOME

Good morning! Welcome to our worship service in a new and cooler place. A change  
of surroundings can sometimes give us a new perspective, so let us open ourselves  
to the new things that God wants to do in each of our lives, - perhaps in the  
basement places of our lives.

They who wait on the Lord will renew their strength;  
They will mount up with wings like eagles;  
They will run and not be weary;  
They will walk and not faint.

Let us turn to our God with praise and thanksgiving- : God we praise you for the morning  
VU 415.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- As part of our simplifying the summer services- there will be no formal offering time during the service; this relieves the need for lay people to commit to helping out on summer Sundays. But there is an offering plate- by the exit door, if you choose to make an offering.
- Lemonade will be served down here at the end of the service- We hope you'll stay for a few moments of friendship time.
- Invite the children to come forward

### AFTER KIDS TIME

When we pray, we do not pray so much to change God's mind as to allow God to change us.

Let us now open ourselves the God's Spirit  
so that God may work God's will in us.

Let us turn to our worship folders for our prayer for renewal,  
starting with- O Breath of life.