

## **Willow River Parish—Clear Lake, Deer Park, Forest United Methodist**

### **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

“To what will I compare this generation? It is like a child sitting in the marketplaces calling out to others, ‘We played the flute for you and you didn’t dance. We sang a funeral song and you didn’t mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ Yet the Human One came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved to be right by her works.”...

At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you’ve hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have shown them to babies. Indeed, Father, this brings you happiness.

“My Father has handed all things over to me. No one knows the Son except the Father. And nobody knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal Him.

“Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”

#### **1. Jesus**

There is a wonderful legend concerning the quiet years of Jesus, the years prior to His visible ministry. The legend claims that Jesus the carpenter was one of the master yoke-makers in the Nazareth area. People came from miles around for a yoke, hand carved and crafted by Jesus son of Joseph.

When customers arrived with their team of oxen, Jesus would spend considerable time measuring the team, their height, the width, the space between them, and the size of their shoulders. Within a week, the team would be brought back and He would carefully place the newly made yoke

over the shoulders, watching for rough places, smoothing out the edges and fitting them perfectly to this particular team of oxen.

That's the yoke Jesus invites us to take. Do not be misled by the word "easy,". Its root word in Greek speaks directly of the tailor-made yokes: they were well-fitting. The yoke Jesus invites us to take, the yoke that brings rest to the weary souls, is one that is made exactly to our lives and hearts. The yoke He invites us to wear fits us well, does not rub us nor cause us to develop sore spirits and is designed for two. His yokes were always designed for two. Our yoke-partner is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

Running throughout all scripture from the beginning to the end is the theme that ours is a burden bearing Christ. He is not just a Lord whom we burden, and we do, but a Lord who actually solicits our burdens. He would be effective must first be free from his burdens. It is Jesus Christ who frees us.

## **2. The Yoke**

So often Christianity or religion in general is criticized as being too demanding, placing a heavy burden upon believers. In some circles there is the thought that life as Christian is too confining or restrictive. These criticisms are derived from a belief that old friends and familiar places will have to be sacrificed on the altar of piety. Yet Jesus says, "My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light." The writer of Matthew informs the reader that humble submission to God actually brings freedom and a way to lighten the load. Unlike the yoke of oxen, which is heavy and conjures images of being forced to work hard in the heat of the day, the yoke of Christ is love and companionship. As the Lord's Prayer illustrates, those who walk with Christ want for nothing. Do our lives witness to Christ as burden-bearer?

### 3. A Beautiful Doxology

Early one morning some years ago, Robert Raines got into his car and started driving through the mountains. There was no one on the road at that time of the day. The mountains were quietly beginning a new day. The beautiful colors of Autumn were splashed all over the trees. It was a magnificent and glorious sight as the early morning sun glistened on the wonders of the mountains and the valleys below.

Then it happened...Robert saw one of the most beautiful things he had ever witnessed in his life.

Right there at the very edge of that great mountain peak and facing the gorgeous valley below...was a young man in his early twenties with a trumpet pressed to his lips. With his lungs expanded fully and releasing all of the energy in his soul, he was playing the Doxology on his trumpet.

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!”

The point is clear: With all the stresses and problems in this life, still the truth is: We have so many doxologies to sing—so much to be grateful for—so many blessings to count.

The point is: Life is more than a grueling endurance test—life is more than a survival game—life is more than a coping competition.

It's not enough to just escape the stress—it's not enough to just endure the stress. Thank God there is another option, and that is Jesus Christ.

#### 4. Yesterday's Yoke

Few people today use yokes anymore—we often have to explain that a yoke is equipment used to hitch animals together and to something else, such as a plow. Machines do do much of our farming, and so few people work the land, that a yoke is an antique, a museum piece, not an everyday item.

However, for Jesus and the people in His community, the yoke was very much current and everyday. The most obvious use was agricultural. A yoke also represented a system, often a system of bondage—whether that system is economic, political, or intellectual. Sometimes people are put under the yoke of an oppressive power, as the Israelites had been by the Babylonians, or as they were under the Romans. Sometimes the yoke is a choice—by choosing to follow a particular teacher, one took his yoke upon oneself. The yoke was the system of teachings, the teacher's philosophy. Sometimes a system that should be life-giving—like the Torah—is turned into an oppression, as we see with the wise and intelligent—the Pharisees and the scribes—who have made the good law of God into a religious and political system that oppresses people and need to be broken.

Jesus calls all of us who are caught in those systems, especially those weary of following all six hundred thirteen laws to the letter and still wondering about the grace of God, especially those who believe God's love has to be earned, to come to Him and trade that yoke for another.

We might think that the point of breaking the oppressive yoke was to be free. We all know that isn't exactly true—as Bob Dylan once said, we “Gotta Serve Somebody.” The question is: will we be yokes to the letter of the law—to the economic and political system—to our possessions—social status—desires? Will we be yokes to our limited understanding of God, or to what we think the good life looks like? Or will we slip into the empty side of Jesus' yoke and partner with Him in the work God has in mind for the world?

## 5. Strength

There was a little boy who was out helping Dad with the yard work. Dad asked him to pick up the rocks in a certain areas of the yard. Dad looked over and saw him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. The little boy struggled and struggled while dad watched. Finally, the boy gave up and said, "I can't do it." Dad asked, "Did you use all of your strength?" The little boy looked hurt and said, "Yes, sir, I used every ounce of strength I have." The father smiled and said, "No you didn't. You didn't ask me to help." The father walked over and then the two of them pulled that big rock out of the dirt.

One of the great Biblical truths seems impossible. Liberty comes through being yoked with Christ.