7-5-2020, The Holy Way

Sermon on Matthew 11: 16—19, 25—30

1. Introduction
2. This passage is preceded by Jesus affirming John the Baptizer and his ministry. At the time of this teaching by Jesus, John is in prison.
3. So frequently in Matthew we encounter some mention of how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy. This idea is absent in today’s passage. This is a simple teaching about what it means to follow Jesus.
4. Prayer
5. The text
6. (v. 16—19) **The current generation** To what shall I compare this generation?
7. (v. 16b & 17) They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others, “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.” [The idea here is that children who are bored may try to get other children to play their game. If they don’t succeed, they whine because the other children aren’t doing what they want. Jesus says that people who should be thrilled to learn about the Kingdom of God are the same way.]
8. (v. 18 & 19) **Jesus and John the Baptizer**
9. (v. 18) For John came neither eating or drinking [modeling a very strict, ascetic, prophet-like life] and they say, “He has a demon.”
10. (v. 19a) The Son of Man came eating and drinking [acting like the common people] and they say, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”
11. (v. 19b) But wisdom is proved right by her deeds. [This is something like “The proof is in the pudding.” Both Jesus and John, and their respective ministries, will be validated in time.]
12. In the intervening verses, Jesus pronounces judgement on those cities where he had performed the majority of his miracles. These are cities who should have responded most favorably to his message concerning the Kingdom of God, but instead the message was mostly rejected.
13. (v. 25 & 26) **Praise to God** At that time Jesus said,
14. (v. 25b—25d) “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because
15. (v. 25c) You have hidden these things [the critical things concerning the Kingdom of God and God’s grace] from the wise and learned [at least in their own estimation. This is a warning concerning trusting too much in your own reputation for wisdom and knowledge]
16. (v. 25d) And revealed them to little children [those who are vulnerable and dependent on others]
17. (v. 26) Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. [God is sovereign and can choose to whom truth will be shown and from whom it will be hidden. This is a part of what it is to be God.]
18. (v. 27) **Relationships** All things [all wisdom, all authority, all knowledge, all of heaven and earth] have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows [This word means “is in authentic relationship with” rather than “is acquainted with”] the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those whom the Son [graciously] chooses to reveal him.
19. (v. 28—30) Jesus’ invitation [I find this to be one of the most lovely and comforting passages in all of Scripture.]
20. (v. 28) Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. [Does that describe you? Weary and burdened? It absolutely describes me.]
21. (v. 29) 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.
22. (v. 30) Because my yoke is easy and my burden is light.
23. What do we take away from this passage?

First, the message of Jesus, and the scandal that salvation comes not from our own merit but by God’s grace, is not always a popular one. We should not be surprised by this. Two of the key elements in our DNA as Americans are that we are each in charge of our own destiny and that our worth derives from what we accomplish. The doctrine of grace runs directly counter to these ideas. The doctrine of grace teaches that God floods us with grace because God chooses to do so, and that we can’t do anything to earn it or deserve it.

There are other elements of Christian teaching that run against the grain of our culture. We’re taught by Jesus that meekness and humility are qualities o be valued above others. We’re taught that we are to love others, even if they don’t love us back. We’re even taught that we are to love our enemies! Can you imagine? So we shouldn’t be surprised or discouraged when our message doesn’t make sense to others. The gospel, the Good News is true, whether it’s accepted or rejected by others.

Second, God’s choices are based on criteria that aren’t familiar to us. If I’m looking for someone to take my message forward, I’m going to look for the biggest, strongest, smartest, fastest, best. God chooses to reveal the truth to those who are vulnerable and in need. One of the things this means is that, in the work of the Kingdom, our credentials don’t mean very much. Our value and our worth come from the fact that we are created in God’s image and that we are beloved of God. This should, but doesn’t always, move us to a place of humility.

Third, it is through Jesus the Christ that we have an authentic relationship with God. Jesus was born into human skin, lived the life of a rural carpenter’s son, taught about the Kingdom of God, died a sacrificial death, and was raised back to eternal life, so that we could have this relationship.

And fourth, Jesus invites us. Just as Jesus invites us to the communion table, he invites us to come to him and unburden ourselves of the things that don’t matter. He promises that he will give us the rest we need. And that sounds pretty good to me right now.

Then there’s a lot of talk about yokes. As I was growing up, I saw some oxen yokes in museums. And I was familiar with horse collars, which serve the same function as a yoke. In fact, when I was 15 or 16, my best friend and I built a buckboard and, through the kindness of a lot of people in that valley, we put together a full set of harness and taught a couple of our horses to pull it. So I knew a little bit about yokes.

But a yoke for a person? It didn’t make sense to me. But if I’d paid a little more attention to those pictures of Dutch people carrying buckets of milk on a shaft that rests on the shoulders, I might have gotten the idea. The function of a yoke is to spread the weight of a burden over a larger muscle group, so the work can be done more easily. And Jesus says, “Take my yoke. Learn from me. I will teach you, and my way is gentle and humble. I will give you rest for your soul. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Note that Jesus doesn’t say, “Come to me and sit down and stay sitting down and there’s nothing you need to do.” No! Of course not! What Jesus says is that, if we take up the work he calls us to, he will help us and accompany us on our journey. And that’s what we need right ow.

The past two sermons have had a lament at their cores. Today’s sermon is different. What is at the core of this sermon is not lament, but rather comfort and assurance. We still have work ahead of us. We are being called at this moment in our history to confront the cruelty and the brutality of racism in all its forms. I believe absolutely that this is the leading of the Holy Spirit. And the only way we can carry this work out is to do it in relationship and community with Jesus, the Christ, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. Are you ready to journey with him? May it be so. Amen