

JULY 5, 2020 5TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST YEAR A

(P)As we begin our worshipping together let us do so with an act of forgiveness: May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

MORNING PRAYER

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Living Word, shine on this day. Quicken my steps and open my ears that I might approach each neighbor with an expectant heart. Amen.

PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION

Merciful God, in this moment of stillness, wash us clean of our presumptions. Receive us as your weary children. Then, by the power of your Spirit, bless us with a word that revives, for we pray in the name of Jesus, your living Word. Amen.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

16“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 17‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ 18For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; 19the 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.”

25At 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; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All 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. 28"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon

Pastor Karen

"The Accent Sorrowful Rebuke, Authority and Compassion"

John came, living in the desert, fasting and despising food, isolated from the society of others; and they said of him: 'The man is mad to cut himself off from human society and human pleasures like that.' Jesus came, mixing with all kinds of people, sharing in their sorrows and their joys, Keeping company with them in their times of joy; and they said of him: 'He is a socialite; he is a party-goer; he is the friend of outsiders with whom no decent person would have anything to do.' They called John's self-denial madness;

and they called Jesus' sociability laxness of morals. They could find grounds for criticism either way. (2)

John, who so clearly recognized who Jesus was when he baptized him, is now having doubts. Who can blame him? The great judgment John announced has not materialized, the corrupt are still in power, and John is languishing in Herod's prison.

Jesus tells John's disciples to tell John what they have heard and seen -- the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead raised, and the poor receiving good news (11:5). Although not the mighty judgment John envisioned, these are surely signs of God's kingdom drawing near.

The parable depicts a generation that cannot come to grips with either John or Jesus. Children pipe happy songs and their friends refuse to dance; they play mournful tunes and their friends refuse to weep. The friends are totally unresponsive. They apparently have no intention of joining in the music. John came as a sober figure, a teetotaler who ate a strange diet, and he was labeled demon possessed. Jesus came as a convivial character, eating and drinking with all sorts of people, and he was dismissed as a glutton and a drunkard. (1)

“This generation” has been given every opportunity to hear, but they refuse. Take the cities where Jesus has done many mighty

works. Citizens have more than enough evidence to discern who he is. But instead of being moved by what they see, the citizens have remained blasé. Their resistance leaves them in a worse state than the pagan cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom.

After John's disciples leave, Jesus speaks to the crowds about John the Baptist with words of high praise. No one who has ever lived is greater than John the Baptist, Jesus says (11:11); “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” He is the fulfillment of prophecy, the Elijah sent by God to prepare the way for the Messiah (11:12-14); “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; 14and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” He stood on the threshold of the kingdom. Yet now the kingdom is breaking in through Jesus, and even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John. (1)

The problem with this generation, Jesus says, is that they listen neither to John nor to Jesus. John's austere lifestyle led people to accuse him of having a demon, while Jesus' habit of eating and drinking with sinners earned him a bad reputation. This generation finds reason to take offense at both John and Jesus and thus to evade the call of both. They are like children in the marketplace who

cannot decide whether they want to play wedding games or funeral games and end up playing neither. (2)

"Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds," Jesus says. Jesus' own deeds give evidence that he embodies and reveals the wisdom of God, that he is "the one who is to come," the one who ushers in God's kingdom.

Skipping over the "woes" to unrepentant Galilean towns (11:20-24) At that time Jesus said; 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the clever, and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for thus it was your will in your sight, All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one really knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal his knowledge.' (1)

Jesus, who is questioned by John the Baptist and is rejected by the people from his own home territory, is only known by the Father. The verb "know" in both Old and New Testaments, of course means more than an act of intellectual perception; it includes the notions of choice and intimacy. The Father, in love, has "elected" the Son, and on the basis of this choice the Son "knows" the Father and can thus disclose the Father to whomever he chooses.

The exclusiveness of the relation of Father to Son reminds us that humans have no capacity of their own to fathom the knowledge of God. Neither the Father nor the Son is a genie to be controlled by human brilliance. God is known only as a gift of incredible grace. Even our efforts to know the Son only end up in images fashioned after ourselves. God simply eludes the human grasp. (2)

Now this is precisely why the “infants” assume the place of divine favor. They make no pretense to knowledge. Whatever they have is given them. They are those who do not judge God by some preconceived principle, those who do not find the crucified Christ either a stumbling block or foolishness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-23). The “infants” are those who let God be God on God’s own terms. (1)

The invitation appropriately brings the passage to a climax. Rather than make demands or lay ponderous loads on followers, the text summons us to a discipleship that is easy and a burden that is light. The invited are, no less than the “infants,” now described as “you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens.” Like the people of the street who are gathered at the last minute for the wedding feast (matt. 22:9-10), these folks find the welcome almost too good to be true.

The offer is “rest,” the divine Sabbath—not, however, to be construed as sheer passivity. In fact, the text is another call to

discipleship. The schooling, however, is distinguished by the fact that it is not obedience to a code of external rules, but loyalty to a leader. “Learn from me” (the verb sharing the same root as the noun “disciple”). Jesus says, “The weary are summoned to a new form of learning in which the teacher is “gentle” and “humble in heart.” (1)

The warnings of the costliness of following Jesus and the possibility of conflict with the powers of the age, needs to be a reminder of the gracious Lord to be followed and the gentleness of his call.

The “infants,” on the other hand, are not regarded as wise or important. They are the poor in spirit, the meek, the merciful, the persecuted, all whom Jesus calls blessed. They are the sick and the lame, the lepers and demon-possessed, the tax collectors and sinners, who come to Jesus for healing of body and spirit. It is God's gracious will to act in ways that confound human wisdom, and so these "infants" see what the wise cannot -- that Jesus is sent by the Father and reveals the Father.

Jesus' prayer then turns to invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest" (11:28). Who are the ones laboring wearily and heavily burdened? It is the common people rather than their leaders. Later

in Matthew, Jesus chastises the scribes and Pharisees because "they tie up heavy burdens hard to bear and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them". The heavy burden they lay on the people is not the law; it is rather their particular interpretation and practice of the law. (2)

The religious leaders in Matthew's story are also complicit with the Roman rulers in maintaining the imperial system. The common people labor wearily under Roman occupation, in which the ruling elite secure wealth, status, and power at the expense of the lowly. Jesus rejects this social order as contrary to God's will: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (20:25-28). (2)

To all those laboring under harsh religious and political systems, Jesus says, "Come to me... and I will give you rest." Rest in can refer to Sabbath rest, the rest of death, or rest from war when Israel's enemies have been subdued. Rest also functions as an image of salvation, of what will be when the world is finally ordered according to God's purposes and enjoys its full and complete

Sabbath. In promising "rest," Jesus promises life under God's reign in the new world that he is bringing into being.

Jesus further invites the weary: "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" (11:29-30). The yoke was a familiar symbol of burden bearing, oppression, and subjugation. Yokes were laid on the necks and shoulders of oxen and also on prisoners of war and slaves. But "yoke" was also used metaphorically with positive connotations, as in the invitation to wisdom in Sirach 51:26, "Put your neck under her yoke, and let your souls receive instruction," and as a rabbinic metaphor for the difficult but joyous task of obedience to Torah. (2)

What is the yoke Jesus offers? We might infer that it is his teaching, his way of discipleship, which is not burdensome but life-giving. He invites the weary to learn from him, for he is not a tyrant who lords it over his disciples but is "gentle and humble in heart." His yoke is easy ("good" or "kind") and his burden is light. To take his yoke upon oneself is to be yoked to the one in whom God's kingdom of justice, mercy, and compassion is breaking into this world, and to find the rest for which the soul longs. (1)

To all who are weary to the bone and weighed down, Jesus says, "Come to me... and I will give you rest."

It is not that Jesus invites us to a life of ease. Following him will be full of risks and challenges, as he has made abundantly clear. He calls us to a life of humble service, but it is a life of freedom and joy instead of slavery. It is life yoked to Jesus under God's gracious and merciful reign, free from the burden of sin and the need to prove oneself, free to rest deeply and securely in God's grace.

This passage closes with the greatest claim that Jesus ever made, the claim which is the center of the Christian faith, that he alone can reveal God to men and women. Other men may be sons of God; he is the Son. John put this in a different way, when he tells us that Jesus said: 'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14:9). What Jesus says is this: 'If you want to see what God is like, if you want to see the mind of God, the heart of God, the nature of God, if you want to see God's whole attitude to men and women- look at me! In Jesus Christ alone we see what God is like; and Jesus can give the knowledge to anyone who is humble enough and trustful enough to receive it. (2)

It is just that simple, it is just that hard.

Thanks be to God.

1. Lectionary notes – The Gospel of Matthew; Professor William Barclay

2. Lectionary notes – The Working Preaching; from my Pastors’ Bible Study Group.

PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE

God of life, we come to you from many places: some hearts overflow with joy and gratitude, others are barely hanging on to hope and faith. For some this is an ordinary morning; for others, every step feels fragile. Holy One, meet us where we are and bind us to each other, that in the community of your love we might discover our wholeness. We name before you now the concerns of our hearts.

God of every beginning, we pray for your children: for infants harbored in their mothers’ wombs, for children exploring the world and testing their imaginations, for youth discovering their own integrity. We pray for children who cannot take safety and comfort for granted. We pray for the children whose innocent lives are taken by gun violence. God of life, we pray for your children all over the world.

Author of time, we ask your blessing on our work and our rest: in jobs that feed our souls and in jobs that do not satisfy, in volunteer service and routine daily tasks, in long hours of caregiving and in hours we do not know how to fill— come to us and show us how we might serve you. We pray for all essential workers, they risk

their health, their lives so we can remain home and safe. We pray for those whose needs we know.

God of all creation enlarge the circles of our concern. Teach us to care for brothers and sisters whose names we cannot say:

We pray for African American brothers and sisters that have lost their lives by police violence, for the protestors that peacefully protested this violence for all races to be treated equally, teach us to love all our brothers and sisters no matter what race, color or religion, for those that have rioted and destroyed property, we ask that they are shown the wrong they have done, for those whose challenges are daunting, though their needs are like our own. We pray for those who are suffering from the Covid 19 virus, for all that suffer any illness or physical ailment. We pray for the families that they lost loved ones. Teach us to care for one another, teach us to care for the earth on whose gifts we all depend. Holy God, we pray for your world as we call on the name of your Son.

LORD'S PRAYER

CHARGE

Rom. 7:15–25a

Sisters and brothers, sin distorts even the good gifts of God: the law, the church, our own desires— but this need not lead us to despair, for God's love has overcome, is overcoming, will overcome sin's power at work in the world.

In Christ's Name,

Pastor Karen