

Scoops #67: Liturgy and Sermon, Sunday, July 5, 2020

Welcome to the “virtual” and “delivered” House of the Lord. Let us be glad and rejoice together!

Our Readings:

Zechariah 9: 9-12 Song of Solomon 2: 8-13 Romans 7: 15-25a

The Collect:

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ has taught us that what we do for the least of your children we do also for Him. Give us the will to serve others as He was the servant of all, who gave up His life and died for us, but lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷“We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
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, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

⁵At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. ²⁷“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

Sermon:

There is nothing like the weather to remind us how fickle we are as human beings! When it's really hot, we complain. When it's not hot, we complain. If the temperature is just right, well, it's too humid or too dry. And if it rains, we're about to drown and if it doesn't rain, the crops will fail. We are never satisfied when it comes to the weather. And because we are never satisfied with it, the weather is one of the most talked about things on the planet.

As it is now, so was it then in Jesus day. The Pharisees, Jesus says, were just acting like children do: They start out doing a pretend wedding, and play the flutes for everyone to sing and dance and someone says “but I'm sad...I don't want to dance”. So the kids put away the flutes and start to play “funeral” – and somebody else says “I don't want to play funeral, because I 'm happy today so everybody takes their own toys and go homes.

That's how the crowds felt about the messengers God sent to them. John the Baptist came telling them to repent and change their ways, and they said “Ah, he's too rigid, he's too narrow, he just doesn't know how to live like a regular guy. Too long in the desert, you know!” Jesus came and loved to eat with sinners and enjoyed wine with meals and with friends and they say “Look at Him, pretending God sent Him, and He's just a drunkard and a glutton? Bottom line, you can't win everybody, and if everybody likes you, then you are not really doing much of anything to challenge anyone. The legalists get tired of having to be good all the time – they just can't do it any more than Paul could. And those who live in grace sometimes get careless with righteous deeds, words and actions. And both groups sometimes just get very tired of it all.

Here is Jesus' good news for us today:

“You who are tired and weary and carry heavy burdens, come to Me, and take my yoke upon you for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

When I think of all the symbols of the church, the signs of the liturgy, I often think that one is missing. We intuitively like the **CANDLE** – Jesus is the light of the world and we are also to be light.

We like the **CROSS as a symbol** –because it speaks to us of our redemption and of the love of Jesus Christ that accepted that Cross. We also remember that we too are to carry a cross.

We like the **stained glass windows**: pictures of real life people who God made special, and we wonder if perhaps we can ever be special by blessing many people as the apostles did.

But I wonder how we'd like it if a **five foot wide cattle yoke** was displayed on the Altar Wall. We're not so sure about being yoked....not much independence there, we like to pick our own direction, and we find anything that holds us back quite unacceptable. A yoke reminds us of slavery. We much prefer the picture of a basin and towel which speaks of us servants. Why did Jesus choose this particular image or symbol to offer us rest and peace for our souls?

Jesus said “My yoke is easy”. He did not say join up with me and you will have an easy life. He did not say that the journey would be without pain. He simply said that He would be in the opposite half of the yoke, and His presence will make the trials, and the troubles, and the burdens and the ploughing through the difficulties more peaceable.

Well, sure, we are apt to think. We all know that two people can lift more than one person, and two heads are better than one. There is something more important here.

“Easy” in the time of Jesus meant “tailor-made” Properly fitted. Not chafing and binding. Basically comfortable. A general everyday yoke would be a yoke made by a sturdy tree branch laid across the shoulders of two oxen and tied under their forelegs with strong leather straps. Anything but comfortable! An easy yoke was also a sturdy tree branch, but stripped of bark, soaked for as long as necessary to make it supple, bent and twisted and shaped to fit the precise measurements of the beasts who were going to use it. An easy yoke was an expensive kindness done by a farmer who cared about his animals. They could pull the plough all day and get a

few strained muscles but they would not get lacerations and tears on the hide of the shoulders and necks. They'd still get tired, but they would not get bloodied.

Jesus is telling us that if we are yoked with Him, walking and praying and working with Him, that which holds us together will be tailor-made to measure, lined and fitted and good. That which holds us together will not hurt us, but will help us to pull the burdens, plough the fields and get the job done.

What holds us to Jesus is a yoke of willing love, His love for us and our love for Him, which has been given to us and grown in us by God's Holy Spirit.

And so I would happily recommend a YOKE a sacred symbol because.

- It would remind us that the Christian life is not a do yourself project
- It would remind us that there are no Lone Ranger jobs in the church
- It would remind us to lay our burdens down each and every day as we come to Jesus to be yoked.

And I can tell you:

Some people would say "That's ridiculous, farm implements belong in barns not in churches"

And other people would say "It's about time – remind all those Mary types to get with the Martha's"

And some would say "What ever happened to free will and independence?"

And other's would say "I always like to have some direction" Thus has it ever been.

Why don't we just stop listening to "others"– and start agreeing with Jesus.

It will lead us to good places:

Often when I spend time with people who are suffering, people who are heartbroken, confused, angry or just in so much pain they don't even know what they are feeling, I find the strangest picture running through my head. It is a picture which enables me to bear suffering alongside them, a picture which enables me to hold hope and a good future for them as real outcomes with God's help. Just

when we find ourselves down and out, without energy, wisdom, beauty, joy, or even faith, just then is when our Lord Jesus enters the picture, like the bridegroom of our Song of Solomon reading.

Picture it with me. Jesus, holding out his hand to you or to me, male or female, and saying:

Rise up, my fair one, and come with Me. It has been winter too long for you, it has been cold and stark and bleak. But now the winter is past. You have shed so many tears – it is like the heavens opened and poured down rain - but now the rain is over and past. Look...flowers are appearing on the earth, the birds are singing their joys, and the dove of peace is cooing and settling in the territory of your heart. The good things are coming again, springing from the vines and the trees; the fragrance of blossoms brings pleasure once more. Rise up, my fair one, and come away....

That scene and those words are what I hold in my mind so that I can comfort others when I haven't the slightest idea how to help them. I believe for them that the winter will be over and the time of singing will come. I even believe that for myself. I often drink my own medicine.

And yet it remains a choice. Their choice, my choice, your choice. We shall not be kidnapped from despair, we must agree to go. Agree to let go of what we hold so tightly in our hands. Agree to take His hand...to let Him lift us from our bed of despair...agree to look and see and taste and smell anew the goodness of God in the land of the living.....or we can choose to stay exactly where we are.

This is God's Word to you this day:

“Rise up, my fair one, and come away - Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden and you will find rest for your souls.” (Judie+)

Please pray **the Lord's Prayer!**

The Blessing: May the peace of God which passes all our understanding keep your hearts and minds fixed on the love of God and the knowledge of his Son Jesus Christ and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always!

