

Matthew 11:16-30  
July 5, 2020

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, it's kind of hard to tell with the way the Gospel has been chopped up today, but today's text is actually all about repentance. It's about acknowledging our sin, how we've been against God, and then turning back to God in humility and walking with God once again.

After worship, you can go open your Bible, if you don't already have it opened, and see what comes before this and what is missing from the middle of today's reading.

Right before today's text, we hear about John the Baptizer, who went out and called the people to repent. In the middle we have woes to all of the cities who hadn't turned and recognized Jesus as the one and only Lord and Savior.

In the midst of the Scriptures and the presence of the Lord, people fail to turn and recognize what's going on right under their noses. They are too busy worrying about themselves, to even look up and see what is happening. They fail to hear the cries going out in the public square right in front of them.

Repentance literally means to turn. To turn and see what's going on. To turn and lend an ear. To turn and smell the roses. To turn from our selfish ways and follow God. Basically, to turn our entire beings to face God.

For us humans, it's really easy to get caught up in our own lives and miss God calling to us. We get tunnel vision. We can only see what is right in front of us, the things we feel we have to do, and that takes up all of our time and energy.

But, if we just stop and look up, we might hear and see God calling us, calling us to another way, calling us to care for one another, calling us to help Jesus carry the load of love, because he cannot do it all alone.

And so God sends the Holy Spirit to lead us, today and every day. But, we have to turn to the good news, because it's not what we teach ourselves. We have to turn toward the good news in order to be able to live it in the world. We need to see and hear Jesus in order to be his body in the world.

That may seem intimidating, but Jesus reassures us, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” His yoke is easy. So, let’s take a look at what a yoke is. It is not the yellow part in the middle of an egg. This is a yoke. <put up picture on bulletin>

A yoke joins animals together so that they can more easily pull a load. A yoke always joins animals together. It is never a solo job. You never yoke one animal. That’s nonsensical. Yoke always means two or more.

And so, in this picture we see Jesus and another person joined together. They are yoked. This picture also reminds us Jesus call to take up our cross and follow him. The yoke looks like the part of the cross Jesus carried to the crucifixion.

In Baptism we are guaranteed that we are yoked to God forever, and the Holy Spirit is the one who joins us together. When water is poured on our head and we are sealed with the cross of Christ forever, we are yoked to Jesus. We are buried in his death and risen into new life in him, and together we go out into the world to pull the load of sharing God’s love.

But, if we don’t spend time in the scriptures, in worship, in prayer, in fellowship with other believers, we tend to get backwards in our yoke and we start to face the opposite way of Jesus, which makes it impossible for the wagon filled with God’s love to make it out into the world, or the plow to open the earth for the planting of the seed.

So, repentance is a huge part of what we do. Every Sunday and Wednesday during worship, we remember our sinfulness and we turn back to God. We turn ourselves so that we can walk with Jesus, instead of against him. We recommit ourselves to listening to God’s call. We lift up our heads to listen and look for Jesus.

Where are we being called? Where are we being sent? How might we share God’s love in the world? Where should we be dancing and where should we be mourning?

We have to lift our heads up from our own belly buttons in order to find out. We have to put on our cross eyes to see and our empty tomb ears to hear.

In repentance, we are committing ourselves once again to walk with God. In repentance, we confess that we have turned around in the yoke and are facing the wrong way. In repentance, we allow God to rearrange the yoke, so that once again the yoke is easy and the burden light as we walk with Jesus instead of against him.

It’s easier to walk in love than it is in hate.

And, when we walk with Jesus, we find that we are not walking with Jesus alone. It's not just the two of us. We are actually yoked with all the believers from all time and all places, with those around the world and those who haven't even been born yet. That makes the burden even lighter than before.

The cargo that we pull is love, the seed we plant is hope, and the more we love, the more others will join us in the yoke, making the burden even lighter.

Have you noticed that if you are the only one wearing a mask in the store, that it's kind of hard to wear the mask. But, if you are in a store and most people are wearing a mask it's somehow easier?

People don't like to feel like outsiders. We innately want to be part of the majority. Safety in numbers. But, if we live into our convictions, especially when others are in disagreement with us, we can change the tide.

One person boldly acting in love can cause others to live in love well. One of my favorite prayers comes from the Chosen People worships service written by Dakota Road. It's part of the "We can make a difference song." It goes like this: They're afraid to take a chance; it just takes one who's bolder. We can make a difference now.

When one person lives boldly in love, others will join that person. It just takes one to be bold.

When someone asked Luther if they should be afraid of sinning when they feel called to do something out of care or concern, Luther told him – "Sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly."

We're not judged on our actions by themselves, but the motivation that is behind them. So, never be afraid to love – to show grace and mercy. Because, the more we love, the more others will join us in love. Love is one of those things that has to be shared with others in order for it to grow, and that causes the yoke to widen and the burden to be even lighter.

God loves us, so God sent Jesus. Jesus loved the apostles and the early disciples, so Jesus sent them out and they loved even more people, and then those people became disciples and they loved even more people, and that love is continuing to spread all across the globe today.

We are a part of that love movement.

Love is a really easy yoke, because love only requires relationship. Real love is not tit for tat. In true love, nothing is ever owed. All you can ever do is respond to real love. You can't earn love. You can't destroy it.

God loves us unconditionally. Jesus proves that to us through his death and resurrection. And God asks nothing from us in return. I mean, how could we ever repay God for all that God has given us, which is absolutely everything on the face of the Earth? We can't owe God anything when God already owns everything.

All we can do is respond to God's graciousness and join with Jesus in God's work of redemption for the whole world - to just help people turn around and see God's love all around them.

And so Jesus invites us to take on his yoke to help him deliver the good news of this love to the entire world and to plant the seeds of hope.

The burdens of this world all revolve around earning. Jesus removes that burden from us when it comes to being part of God's family. You cannot earn what cannot be earned. So just stop. Stop and rest and turn your head to Jesus. Hear him say that you are loved. See him on the cross and then look to the empty tomb.

Jesus was killed by those who thought God's love had to be earned, and that it could be withheld. God emptied the tomb to prove that earning love is absurd. It is a gift freely given, even to those who had Jesus nailed to a cross.

So, when you get stuck in the rut of feeling like a failure, stop, turn, repent, and see Jesus' arms open wide on the cross. Repent, turn and see that the tomb is empty.

Love has set you free. In love, you are free. With love, you are filled with an abundance of love to freely share it in the world, for the sake of the world.

Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is super light. It's actually so easy and light that we are pulled by it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.