

King of Glory Lutheran Church

July 4/5, 2020

Year A: 5th Weekend after Pentecost: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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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.’*

¹⁸ *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹ the 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.”*

²⁵ *At 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; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All 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. 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

I hope you enjoyed the children’s message from Sky Ranch Lutheran Camp. I love seeing camp this summer when I can’t be there myself and I hope you do as well.

I love Sky Ranch. I love the mountains. I love the worship and the campfires. But most of all, I love the people, especially the summer staff.

This summer even in the midst of COVID-19 there are young adults working up at Sky Ranch. Camp is not happening as it normally would. And I’m sorry for that and for everyone who won’t get to experience camp this summer. The staff are isolated up at camp doing extra staff training, hiking, work projects and creating virtual camp resources like the children’s sermon you just watched. They have adapted just as we have to doing ministry in new ways.

Now if you were at camp this summer, even for just a few hours, you would notice something. The summer staff never go anywhere without their backpacks.

These backpacks are filled with all the essentials for camp. Bible, sunscreen, bug repellent, water bottle, hat, sweatshirt. Some backpacks are a lot heavier than others. But no matter how big or small those backpacks are, counselors carry them all around camp everywhere they go.

Maybe you've carried a backpack at one time or another. To school, on a hike, to work, or on a trip.

We carry stuff with us wherever we go! Even a global pandemic doesn't change that! When I listen to our gospel reading this week I can picture all of those summer staff up at Sky Ranch with a backpack always over their shoulders, people weighted down by the load they carry.

We each have our own load to carry, our own burdens. Sometimes they are overwhelming, tipping us over, making it hard to take a step forward. Sometimes they are balanced and bearable. Sometimes they are light. But always we have them, our burdens, those things we carry with us wherever we go.

So what's in your backpack today? What are you carrying? What burdens are weighing you down?

You know, everywhere Jesus went, the gospel writers tell us, he met people who were carrying heavy burdens.

There were people who were sick, suffering and dying. And there were people who were hungry, always hungry. And then there were those people who were outcasts, lonely, forgotten. People overcome with grief. People who experienced injustice because of their race, gender, religion, or economic status. And again and again Jesus met people who carried with them unmet expectations. Does any of this sound familiar?

Today Jesus looks at the people gathered around him and says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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."

As we hear these words, this invitation, let's first spend a moment considering what Jesus *didn't* say. Jesus did not say, I see that you are carrying some heavy burdens, let me add on a few more. Jesus didn't pass out a list of what he required of people before he healed them or fed them. He certainly didn't give a test to his disciples so that they could prove their abilities or their goodness or so that he could measure their faith before he invited them to follow him.

There are of course many things Jesus taught and commanded his followers to do: love one another, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned. But first Jesus says come to me, know that you are loved and cared for, and find rest in me.

When you meet Jesus, he invites you to listen to him and rest in his love. Then you will be equipped to go out and do God's work, ministering to your neighbor.

In our gospel reading today Jesus comments on the confusion and foolishness of the people around him. They are people who don't see what is right in front of them. They don't recognize Jesus.

And having said that Jesus recognizes what those same people need. "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me..."

Professor Jennifer Kaalund from Iona College reminded me this week that "though we think of the yoke as equipment for an animal, the term was often used in rabbinic literature to refer to the task of obedience to the Torah (the law)." Professor Kaalund writes that, "In order to obey the law, you must know the law. Jesus wants those who are burdened to learn from him; Jesus' gentle instruction will enable you to find rest for your soul; to find wholeness and completion. Getting to know Jesus helps us to know ourselves better."

Jesus offers us his yoke today that is his teachings and his commandments. So today let's learn from Jesus and listen to him. How can we find rest when our burdens become too heavy? How will Jesus teach us his ways and lighten our load?

Jesus said, "learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart."

Gentleness and humility. Of all the attributes Jesus could have spoken about he says this, "learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart."

Jesus is telling us something here, that gentleness and humility are two things he sees that are necessary to finding rest. And I think these are two attributes we don't often speak of but are always needed.

Gentleness. What can Jesus teach us about being gentle? How do we find what is truly gentle in our world when there is so much that is harsh, abrasive and violent?

As we learn from Jesus how to find rest we can begin by being gentle towards ourselves and towards one another. When we find ourselves quick to judge, stressed out, or agitated Jesus reminds us that we need to remember the importance of gentleness, of slowing down, of showing care, and being mindful of what is around us. Practice gentleness this week, with yourself and others. Pray for gentleness and seek it out.

If you are looking for rest, learn from Jesus, the one who is gentle.

Jesus is also humble of heart. And so what about humility? The one who is truly humble knows that they are not capable of doing everything, carrying everything alone. Jesus never said there would be a prize for the person who can carry the biggest load the farthest all by themselves.

Arrogance and pride would teach us that we do not and should not need help, but humility shows us that without God we can do nothing on our own. And God does not ask us to work or live alone.

So we learn from Jesus who is gentle and humble, who will give us rest by taking on and sharing our burdens. And we know that Jesus also needed rest. How did he find rest?

Jesus found rest in prayer.

When Jesus found himself exhausted by the crowds, by suffering, by demands, by grief he went away to pray. He found time to connect with God, to share his burdens, to speak and to listen. When we are weary and tired of carrying our burdens God invites us to set time apart, to put those burdens down and find rest.

And Jesus found rest in community.

I don't know if he was an introvert or an extrovert but I suspect that Jesus found rest in his community. Rest in the company of others who also knew pain and joy, others who carried burdens. In community, with one another, with those who can speak a word of love to us, we can share our burdens and know rest. Right now that might be over the phone or virtually or by being in community wearing your mask and keeping a safe distance between yourself and another person. We are in the midst of a pandemic but we still need our community and can find rest in knowing we are not alone.

Finally, Jesus found rest in service to others.

That may sound odd, after all it's hard work healing and preaching and teaching. And yet, Jesus knew that when you reach out to someone in need you gain perspective. Joys and sorrows take on new depths. When you help lift another's burden you find strength that you may not have known you had. And in that, there is a rest, a peace that is hard to describe.

Whatever burdens you are carrying around with you today, whatever is in your backpack, Jesus invites you this day to find rest and learn from him.

Find rest in his love and forgiveness. Learn from his gentleness and humility. Learn from the one who knew the burdens of this life and yet found rest in God through prayer, through God's people, and through serving others.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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.”

Amen.