

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost 5A, July 9, 2017. Dungeness Valley Lutheran Church, Sequim, WA. Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145: 8-14; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 "The Yoke's on you"

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."

This week Jerry Enzenauer and a couple other members of the Homeless Shelter Committee met with our closest neighbors' homeowners' association. The homeowners voiced their fears about a possible building for homeless families, gently at first, but the voices gradually rose until one person stood and urged the others to join him to fight this in every way possible. Both Jerry and the homeowners had more pleasant things they could have done that evening. The meeting now weighs on the neighbors and the Homeless Shelter Committee alike. A heavy burden no matter how you look at it. And families in Sequim still have the burden of seeking homes and not finding them.

Our time of pastoral transition also places certain burdens upon us. It is easier just to come to church knowing what to expect, not wondering if there will be "changes."

Sorting through mountains of stuff to create an orderly and attractive garage sale is no picnic. The faithful workers, who have been doing this for the sake of charity, have easier and more enjoyable ways to spend their time.

We carry our own personal burdens as well. Caring for others whose needs impact our lives. Worrying about finances, children, and illness. Anxieties, fatigue, too few or too many hours in the day.

But, I submit, the Homeless Committee, the transition team, you who are here today, and the garage sale workers will all tell you, “It’s worth it!” We are called to these burdens – because of circumstances of poverty and need in our community, because of family needs, and because of inevitable transitions which are both poignant and potentially joyful. And because Jesus asked us to care for others.

St. Paul felt despair about the burden of trying to live the way he felt he should live. He cried out – as do many of us – “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...who will rescue me from this body of death?” There it is: the ultimate burden: death.

Who knew more about death and life than our Lord Jesus? He lived, not as one strong and independent in his own right, but as one gloriously dependent on his heavenly father. He died carrying the heavy burden of life and grief and disappointment that we sometimes think we can manage by ourselves. What a burden that cross was! And yet he promises us a rest from burdens.

What did Jesus mean when he said, my yoke is easy and my burden light? He didn’t say we’d be spared the sorrows and troubles of this life. Yet, life’s work CAN stop being a burden and become a yoke that is easy.

A yoke was a piece of wood that was measured and crafted to fit over the neck of an animal so that the animal could pull a plow or a cart. Jesus, as carpenter’s son, may have helped fit and refit yokes for people’s farm animals.

When two animals are to work together, crafting the yoke is particularly tricky. It has to fit both and both are not likely to be exactly the same size. When there is a well-fitting yoke on a pair, the work is a lot easier than if one animal has to bear it all alone or if the yoke makes it hard to share evenly. When the yoke fits, the work can be done. Those of us who have sought to live in close partnership with another can well attest to the critical need for a yoke that takes the abilities and needs of both persons into account!

When the yoke of our work fits God’s call to us, when we find our vocation, our calling, the work is joyful. One doesn’t watch the clock. One doesn’t feel the burden of the hours. One takes pleasure in the work. One is not afraid of making mistakes because the only time one doesn’t make a mistake is when one does nothing at all.

The writer of the Gospel of Thomas, which didn’t get into our Bibles, remembered Jesus’ words this way, “Come to me, for my yoke is comfortable and my lordship is gentle, and you will find rest for yourselves.” Eugene Peterson paraphrases the words like this, “I won’t lay anything

heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”
(The Message)

It's as though Jesus says, “Become my yoke mate, and learn how to pull the load by working beside me and watching how I do it. The heavy labor will seem lighter when you allow me to help you with it.” (T.W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, p. 239ff)

Doing God's will only becomes a burden when we are afraid of never getting it right or when we are trying to appease the angry taskmaster in our heads. Jesus lifts our burdens by yoking us together. We work alongside the One who pleased God with every breath of his life. Jesus always offers a yoke that when shared is suitable and comfortable and appropriate for our age and strength.

Seth told his grandfather, “I think the greatest thing I saw in you was how dedicated you were in taking care of Grandma those last years of her life when she had Alzheimer's. Grandfather astounded his grandson when he said, “I found it absolutely painless, taking care of her.”

Might Jesus have had these words for St. Paul? “Accept the tenderness of my love, my forgiveness; you will discover the spiritual strength that is part of your very being. It's a strength and courage you have as a gift from God. When you accept my love, you discover that the yoke fits you just right.”

Jesus has these words for us as well. In the tender time of transition, in the search for wisdom in our outreach for families in crisis, in our personal burden-bearing and burden-sharing, we find our hope and solace in being yoked together as the Body of Christ in this place, in being yoked together with our Lord.

This is why we celebrate Holy Communion this morning and again next week and the next. We NEED it! Jesus comes to us in his own special way when we lift up our hearts, give thanks, and share bread and wine together as Jesus invited us to when he said, “Take and eat and drink,” for this is me – my body and blood.

In the tender time of transition, people can become discouraged. In the tender time of seeking the right way to serve all our neighbors, the homeowners and those without homes, wheels can fall off. We can go astray in our thinking one way or another. In the tender time of personal burden, we can focus too much on ourselves and not enough on our Lord. And so we stand together in prayer, in Communion, in faith as the Body of Christ, sharing the Body of Christ.

What a privilege, what a mercy, what a delight! This is sabbath rest. Shalom. Wholeness. Rest for our souls. This rest might mean a rest from trying to keep up with everyone around us striving for more of this or more of that. Maybe this rest is taking time for family, taking time

for flowers, taking time to delight in the peace that comes at the end of a day's work when the yoke is removed for a time. Maybe it's saying NO, maybe saying YES.

When we look around for God, we find that God always shows up where we least expect God to be: in the need of our neighbor – rich or poor, near or far, angry or friendly; in the person that doesn't look anything like us; in the person who believes and thinks and acts differently from how we do and, just as importantly, from how we think they should. And in all these circumstances, our call is the same: to care for them, to meet them where they are, to accept them.

It's not easy work. But as we undertake this kind of discipleship, we discover God in Jesus is already there. Waiting for us, encouraging us, forgiving us, bearing us. Which is what makes the burden light, the yoke not just easy but joyful. We turn away from ourselves to meet the other, and find our lives by giving them away. Together – as the Body of Christ. Together seeking wisdom and moving forward in faith. Amen.

Children's message....John the B. didn't eat enough. Jesus ate too much. Ever feel like you can't get it right? You're not alone. Both John the Baptist and Jesus did the will of their God and yet people pointed judgmental fingers at them. People sometimes will judge you. But if you live in God's grace, you are not judged. God accepts you as you are. We all seek to follow Jesus, one this way, one another way. God smiles on our efforts and guides us along the way.