

SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2020
MATTHEW 11:16-19, 25-30
LAY YOUR BURDENS DOWN

ONE THING THAT WE HAVE IN COMMON THIS MORNING IS THAT
WE ALL HAVE BURDENS.

SOME ARE BIGGER, SOME ARE SMALLER.
SOME ARE SELF IMPOSED.
SOME ARE THE RESULT OF CIRCUMSTANCES.
SOME ARE FOISTED ON US BY OTHERS.
BUT WE ALL HAVE BURDENS.

IF YOU'VE EVER THOUGHT OR SAID, *"NO MATTER WHAT I DO,
IT'S NEVER ENOUGH, THEN YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN."*

SINGLE MOMS.
PARENTS OF TODDLERS (OR TEENS).
FAMILIES WHERE BOTH SPOUSES WORK.
THOSE WHO ARE SEARCHING FOR A JOB, BUT CAN'T FIND
ONE...PERSISTENT ILLNESS THAT SAPS YOUR STRENGTH.

ITS NEVER ENOUGH... WHEN
THE BILLS ARE PILED UP HIGHER
THAN THE LAUNDRY,
THE SINK'S FULL OF DISHES, AND
THE KIDS NEED HELP WITH HOMEWORK
AND THE DOG NEEDS TO BE WALKED.

ITS NEVER ENOUGH... WHEN ALL THIS DOING AND STRIVING
STRAINS RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE WE LOVE THE
MOST, LEADING TO MISUNDERSTANDING AND RESENTMENT.

NEVER ENOUGH TIME, MONEY, LOVE, HEALTH, ENERGY, ...
NEVER ENOUGH OF YOU TO MEET EVERYONE'S UNREALISTIC
EXPECTATIONS.

IF YOU CAN RELATE TO ANYTHING AT ALL THAT I JUST
DESCRIBED, THEN I WANT TO REASSURE YOU THAT JESUS
UNDERSTANDS. HE GETS IT.

OUR GOSPEL LESSON THIS MORNING REASSURES US THAT JESUS FELT THE WEIGHT OF IMPOSSIBLE EXPECTATIONS, TOO.

"FOR JOHN THE BAPTIST CAME NEITHER EATING NOR DRINKING AND THEY SAY, 'HE HAS A DEMON.'" THE SON OF MAN CAME EATING AND DRINKING, AND THEY SAY, 'LOOK, A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD, A FRIEND OF TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS.'"

IT'S A CASE OF "DAMNED IF YOU DO, AND DAMNED IF YOU DON'T." SOUND FAMILIAR?

WHILE JESUS, LIKE JOHN, ANNOUNCES THE ADVENT OF THE EMPIRE OF HEAVEN, HIS MINISTRY HAS NOT RESEMBLED THE HARSH, ABRASIVE CAST OF JOHN'S, WHICH IS PROBABLY WHY JOHN'S DISCIPLES HAVE COME TO ASK JESUS IF HE IS REALLY THE ONE COMING OR NOT (11:2-3).

BUT WHETHER THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER IS CAST AS JUDGMENT OR AS REDEMPTION, THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN THE SAME. WHETHER IT WAS JOHN OR JESUS CALLING THE TUNE, FEW HAVE LEFT THE SIDELINES TO JOIN THE DANCE, EVEN IN THE CITIES OF GALILEE WHERE JESUS HAS CONDUCTED MOST OF HIS MINISTRY (11:20-24).

JESUS COMPARES THOSE WHO ARE REJECTING THIS PROCLAMATION TO STREET URCHINS SITTING IN THE MARKETPLACE AND REFUSING TO PLAY EACH OTHER'S GAMES (11:16-19).

MATTHEW TYPICALLY USES THE EXPRESSION "THIS GENERATION" NOT TO DESIGNATE HIS CONTEMPORARIES ALONE, BUT THOSE IN ANY ERA WHOSE LINEAGE IS MORE CLEARLY RELATED TO ADAM AND CAIN AND THEIR OFFSPRING -- I.E., TO THOSE WHO ARE UNFAITHFUL, UNREPENTANT, AND ULTIMATELY VIOLENT IN THEIR DEFIANCE OF GOD (E.G., MATTHEW 23:29-36).

THIS IS THE SAME "GENERATION" THAT MOCKED NOAH'S PREPARATIONS FOR THE FLOOD, TURNED TO IDOLS AFTER GOD

DELIVERED THEM FROM EGYPTIAN SLAVERY, AND REPEATEDLY PURSUED THEIR OWN IMPERIAL AMBITIONS IN THE FACE OF PROPHETIC WARNINGS.

ONE GROUP OF THESE CHILDREN WANTS TO PLAY “WEDDING” BUT CAN’T GET THE OTHERS TO DANCE WHEN THE TUNE IS PIPED. THE OTHER GROUP WANTS TO PLAY “FUNERAL” BUT CAN’T GET THE OTHERS TO MOURN WITH THEM. MOURNING AND DANCING COINCIDE WITH THE DIFFERING CASTS OF JOHN’S AND JESUS’ MINISTRIES. JUST AS SOME REFUSED TO REPENT WHEN CHALLENGED BY JOHN, SO, TOO, THEY REFUSE TO JOIN THE CELEBRATIONS OF JESUS -- “A MAN, A GLUTTON AND A DRUNKARD.” THE CHILDREN ALL JUST SIT, HURLING THEIR BITTER INVECTIVES AGAINST ONE ANOTHER. THIS BECOMES THE NEW GAME. SOUND FAMILIAR?

WHEN NOTHING IS EVER ENOUGH, WE ARE TEMPTED TO DESPAIR.

BUT JUST WHEN IT SEEMS WE CAN’T WIN, JESUS INVITES US TO STOP PLAYING THE GAME.

SO WHAT WOULD IT FEEL LIKE TO TAKE JESUS UP ON HIS INVITATION TO FIND REST? TO GET OFF THE TREADMILL OF PERFECTION AND OVERACHIEVING AND PEOPLE-PLEASING,

WHICH THE BIBLE CALLS “WORKS RIGHTEOUSNESS?” AND FIND REST FOR OUR SOULS?

ITS GOOD TO CELEBRATE OUR NATION’S FREEDOM THIS WEEKEND... TO GIVE THANKS FOR THE LIBERTIES AFFORDED US BY THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

BUT THE SCRIPTURES INVITE YOU TO *PERSONAL* FREEDOM IN CHRIST, BY DECLARING YOUR DEPENDENCE ON HIM ALONE.

I WONDER WHAT IT WOULD FEEL LIKE IF YOU COULD SIMPLY DROP THOSE HEAVY BURDENS YOU’VE BEEN LUGGING AROUND

ALL WEEK - WHATEVER THEY MAY BE – AND LEAVE THEM RIGHT HERE IN THE CHURCH THIS MORNING.

ACCORDING TO OUR TEXT, EVEN RELIGION CAN BECOME A BURDEN.

IN JESUS' DAY, RELIGIOUS LEADERS ADDED THEIR OWN SET OF STRICT RULES AND LAWS TO THE COMMANDS OF GOD, WHICH WERE MEANT TO FREE PEOPLE FOR RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIM, AND EACH OTHER.

248 "THOU SHALTS" - ONE FOR EVERY BONE AND ORGAN IN THE MALE BODY.

(THAT'S HOW MEN THINK, LADIES. OR AT LEAST THAT'S HOW THE PHARISEES THOUGHT).

365 "THOU SHALT NOTS" – ONE FOR EACH DAY OF THE YEAR.

613 BURDENS IN ALL, HUMAN TRADITIONS THAT ACTUALLY ALIENATED PEOPLE FROM GOD AND ONE ANOTHER, RATHER THAN BRINGING THEM CLOSER.

SUCH HUMAN LAWS AND RULES BECAME A BURDEN RATHER THAN A BLESSING, BECAUSE THEY CAN'T CHANGE THE HUMAN HEART.

WE LIVE IN THE FREEST, MOST ECONOMICALLY PROSPEROUS COUNTRY ON EARTH, YET WE HAVE MORE...

MORE STREET CRIME.
 MORE PEOPLE INCARCERATED.
 WE HAVE DEADBOLT LOCKS
 ON OUR DOORS AND
 ALARM SYSTEMS ON OUR
 HOMES AND CARS AND CHURCHES.

SIMPLY SAYING THAT WE ARE FREE DOESN'T MAKE US FREE. IT TAKES MORE THAN A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. IT TAKES MORE THAN HUMAN EFFORT.

ST. PAUL ONCE LAMENTED THAT HE KNEW WHAT WAS GOOD AND RIGHT AND HE WANTED TO DO IT, BUT HE OFTEN FOUND HIMSELF DOING JUST THE OPPOSITE.

AND THE EVIL THAT HE KNEW WAS WRONG, THAT HE IN FACT HATED, HE OFTEN FOUND HIMSELF DOING.

SIN IS A HEAVY BURDEN, TOO.
IT WEIGHS OUR SOULS DOWN
WITH GUILT AND SHAME AND
REMORSE AND "*WHAT IFS.*"

AND NOTHING WE DO WILL BE ENOUGH. BECAUSE WE CAN'T CURE OURSELVES.

SO JESUS INVITES OVERBURDENED PEOPLE LIKE US TO COME TO HIM. "TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU, AND LEARN FROM ME," HE SAYS.

THAT WORD "YOKE" HAS A DOUBLE MEANING. IT'S WAS A SORT OF A WOODEN HARNESS, THAT WOULD LINK TOGETHER TWO ANIMALS, SO THAT THEY COULD PULL A CART TOGETHER, SHARING THE LOAD...

JESUS PROBABLY MADE SUCH YOKES IN HIS FATHER'S WOOD SHOP...

BUT IN JEWISH CULTURE, THE WORD "YOKE" ALSO REFERRED TO THE TEACHING OF A LOCAL RABBI.

TAKE MY YOKE UPON YOU AND LEARN FROM ME. IT'S AN INVITATION TO FOLLOW HIM, TO TRY A DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING, BECAUSE HIS YOKE IS EASY.

HE TOOK OUR SIN UPON HIMSELF.

HIS DEATH ON CALVARY IS ENOUGH. HIS RESURRECTION IS ENOUGH. HIS SPIRIT WITHIN US IS ENOUGH TO MAKE US TRULY FREE.

THOSE WHO TAKE HIS YOKE UPON THEM WILL RECEIVE ENOUGH HOPE, ENOUGH FORGIVENESS, ENOUGH PEACE AND LOVE TO LAST A LIFETIME, EVEN AN ETERNITY.

IN A FEW MOMENTS WE WILL MAKE A DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE ON CHRIST ALONE, AS WE PROFESS OUR FAITH THROUGH THE CREED, AND AS WE COME FORWARD FOR COMMUNION.

I WONDER WHAT OUR LIVES COULD BE LIKE, IF ONLY WE WOULD DROP OUR BURDENS RIGHT HERE AT THIS ALTAR AND LEAVE THEM WITH JESUS.

I WONDER WHAT OUR JOBS AND FAMILIES AND CHURCHES COULD BE LIKE IF WE REFUSED TO PICK THEM UP AGAIN TOMORROW.

I WONDER HOW WE COULD IMPACT THIS COMMUNITY IF WE SHARED WITH THE OVERBURDENED PEOPLE WE MEET

SOME GOOD NEWS ABOUT A GOD WHO TAKES BURDENS IN EXCHANGE FOR NEW LIFE...

LIFE THAT IS ABUNDANT.
LIFE THAT IS FREE.
LIFE THAT IS ENOUGH.

AMEN.

