

**Pentecost 8 - Year A  
6 July 2008  
Saint Anne's Episcopal Church  
Lee's Summit, Missouri**

**Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love.  
AMEN.*

Several weeks ago, I said that the Gospel of Matthew is all about radical discipleship. And, if you didn't believe me when I said that or if you didn't quite understand what I meant by radical discipleship, the readings from Matthew on Sundays since then have made the point pretty clear, I think.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel from the readings on the past few Sundays.

Jesus said...

**No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.**

And, Jesus said...

**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.**

And, Jesus said...

**As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'...Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food...See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves.**

And, Jesus said...

**Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.**

That's tough stuff. Difficult, really difficult, words of radical discipleship

It's as if Jesus was saying, "So, you want to be my disciple? Well, here's the deal. It isn't going to be easy. It's no day in the park that you're signing on for. It's going to be very difficult. You may have to turn your back on your family and all the security you've known in your life. It's about carrying a cross. Are you really up to it?"

No smooth words about being a disciple from Jesus. No cajoling. No glib promises. No hint that being a disciple is about being just a little better person than you already are. It's about total transformation. No hint that being a disciple is going to make life easy and comfortable. Far from it.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Jesus uttered the words that we heard in today's reading.

**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.**

What in the world has happened to the Jesus we heard before?

One preacher has suggested that it almost sounds like Jesus took some sort of marketing class or sales seminar between those earlier words and these.

This is the Jesus we want to hear, isn't it? It's certainly the Jesus I want to hear.

On the surface, it all sounds like words of comfort, doesn't it? It sounds almost disconnected from what we heard earlier, doesn't it?

But, is that what we are to make of this great invitation from Jesus? Only comfortable words, comforting words from Jesus after all those difficult words about what it means to be his disciple? I'd like for us to explore that question this morning.

In this great invitation, Jesus is addressing those to whom he has consistently addressed himself and those to whom his heart goes out. Jesus addressed this invitation to those who are in need.

Are you tired and worn out by the burdens of life? Has life become a grind for you? Are you discouraged? Do you try to do your best and to help others? Do you want to be a good person; but, whatever you do, it never seems to be quite good enough? Do you feel guilty, inadequate? Do you feel like a failure?

And, Jesus said to folks who answered "yes" to those questions, "Good. You're just who I'm looking for. Come to me. I have two things I want to give you."

"First, I will give you rest."

The first gift Jesus gave to those who answered "yes" to his questions was refreshment. One of the early church fathers wisely commented, that Jesus' promise was "Not 'I will save you' only, but what is much greater, 'I will refresh you,' that is, I will set you in all quietness." I will set you in all quietness. What could be better refreshment for tired people?

And then Jesus said, “Second, I will give you some equipment for carrying all your burdens and duties, now and in the future. Here, put my yoke around your neck, on your shoulders.”

Now, as a person who does feel the burdens of life many times, if setting me in all quietness sounded good to me, like just what I need most, then getting a yoke put on my shoulders sounds like what I need least.

I don't know about you, but I need some nice soft pillows, a good book to read, and some time off. I'm not much of a farm girl and I don't know a whole lot about yokes (really not I don't know much of anything about yokes), but a yoke just sounds like something heavy, like one more burden for me to carry.

But, you see Jesus knows what tired people, tired people like me and maybe like you, need. We need a new, better way to carry the burdens of life, a fresh way to bear our responsibilities. And, that's what I think Jesus was talking about.

Jesus knows that human life is a succession of challenges and burdens to carry. We cannot get away from them - no matter how fast we try to run from them or how well we try to hide from them or how cleverly we try to elude them. We can't avoid them.

So, instead of offering a way out, an escape – Jesus offered equipment. The yoke that Jesus offered was equipment to help us bear our challenges and carry our burdens.

And, what was the yoke that Jesus offered?

Well, I think the yoke that Jesus was talking about was the way of discipleship. The way of life described by those same, very difficult, teachings that I mentioned a few moments ago.

Jesus knew that being his disciple, as difficult as discipleship would be, was easier than living the way the world teaches us to live. One preacher has said that being obedient to the teachings of Jesus will develop a

sense of balance in us and a way of carrying life that will give us more rest than the way we have been living.

You see the way of discipleship, as Jesus taught it, fits how we were created. That's why it is an easy yoke. That's why it makes the burdens we have to carry light.

It fits. Who better than the one who was present at our creation – Jesus, the Son of the Father - to place that easy yoke, that yoke that fits, there to help us bear the burdens of life?

Now, I said that I don't know a whole lot about yokes, and I don't. But, I do know that one animal doesn't wear a yoke by itself. A farmer places a yoke on two animals, so that the two share the burden.

And, someone who did know something about yokes once told me that yokes are many times used to help train an inexperienced animal to learn to pull the load. You see the farmer yokes an inexperienced animal with an experienced one, so the inexperienced one can learn how to do the job.

And, here's the real gift that Jesus presented in his great invitation. Not only will Jesus give us refreshment and equipment for carrying our burdens, but Jesus himself will be yoked with us.

In his great invitation, I think Jesus was saying, "Come be my yoke-mate. I'll help you carry the load, and I'll teach you how to carry your part of the burden better. Don't think you can learn to be my disciple by sitting down and reading a book or listening to a sermon about me. Learn how to be my disciple by working beside me and watching how I do it. You can be my apprentice in this way of discipleship"

**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.**

Jesus made this invitation to tired, burdened people in first century Palestine. People tired from trying to keep the Jewish law as it had been interpreted by their religious leaders, people burdened with the oppression of the Roman empire which occupied their country and demanded taxes that forced them into poverty.

But, thanks be to God, Jesus' invitation didn't have an expiration date. It wasn't time limited. He still offers this great invitation to each of us here today. Jesus says to us:

Are you tired? Worn out? ...Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly (from *The Message*).

May Christ give us faith to trust the promise of his invitation and grace to allow him to shoulder our load with us.

AMEN.