

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

*Jesus said to the crowd, “To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,*

*‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’*

*For John 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!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”*

*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; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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.*

*“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.”*

There is an ancient legend about Jesus. It starts out with something that we all know. Jesus was a carpenter, just like Joseph was. Next, it fills in parts that we don't necessarily know. It tells about how that he had been trained in a life of precision. It explains that detail was their trademark.

One of Jesus specialties, and this is where the legend part comes in, was yoke making. He was an absolute master. As the legend goes, people would bring their oxen from all over the region to have Jesus make their yokes. They sought him out and he would assess and measure their oxen in great detail...their height, their width, how they stood next to each other, the contour of their shoulders. He would walk with them and assess their temperament, and their stride, and their aptitude and their willingness for their work. Before he would ever lift a saw or a plane, he seemed to have the ability to know them completely in every aspect.

And then he would get to work. And when he was done, it was beautiful. Its fit was perfect. Smooth and rounded in all the right places. Thick and strong where that was necessary. Places meticulously carved out in just the right way so that reigns would provide gentle guidance with just the lightest of pressure. Each yoke was custom made for each animal and for each

team. And in the end, what came as a result of a Jesus made yoke would be “easy”. The burden of the work for which his yokes were made would be light.

Well, that’s the legend. I like it. It is unlikely that Jesus was a master yoke builder in the first century, but, in a parable-like form, it paints a wonderful picture of our Gospel passage this morning. “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.” But also, like most parables, the truth that it delivers is most often not right there on the surface. We have to dig a bit.

For example: “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

It is an invitation. “Come to me!” he is saying. Come to me, all of you out there throughout the countryside, and within all the cities; all of you who are worn down by the world. All of you who are carrying loads that have become too heavy to bear, come find me, and I will provide for you the way to relief.

Do you find that the ways of the world often too much to handle? Are you tired of the name calling, the power seeking, the treasure focusing? Are you frustrated by the solution avoiding, the love redefining, and the truth diluting? Come to me, Jesus says, because he has a better way, and a more loving way, and a more truthful and even effective way. Come to him and you will find that his way will bring joy and peace and rest.

He goes on... “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.” Here is where the perception of the passage breaks down a bit. Take my yoke upon you. What we need to understand here is that a yoke is not optional. We will be yoked. We choose our yokes. We will be yoked to either the way of the world or to Christ. Jesus is inviting to take on his yoke. Become yoked to him in order to find something more, so much more that it will be “easy”.

And then learn from him.

In our legend, Jesus creates the perfectly fitting yoke for the oxen, smooth and custom designed to fit their contours, and their personalities, and their inclinations. When those yokes are put on it is like a well fitted glove.

The yoke that Jesus makes for us is also perfectly fitted, however, they are perfectly designed to fit wo we were made to be, but are not yet. That is why Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you...and learn from me.” Here is how it works: the yoke is perfectly molded to our created selves, since that is true, it may not fit and feel like a perfectly fitting glove at the beginning. As a matter of fact, it is not supposed to. It is designed perfectly not in order to fit our desires and inclinations, but rather to gently and humbly mold us into God’s desires and

inclinations for us. Take the yoke of Christ and be formed to it, and then we will, through that process, find rest for our souls, both in the physical world and for eternity.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

We like easy, don't we. To us easy means a lack of hard work. It is sitting on the beach or by the lake, sipping on a cold drink and munching on our favorite snack. We really enjoy easy. We can even tolerate a yoke, so long as it is easy, right? Dishes and clothes that wash themselves. Lawn services, and fast food, microwave meals, and consequence-free choices.

But the thing is that the word in Greek that we translate as "easy" and we define as carefree living was understood differently when Jesus said those words to the people. In Vine's New Testament Greek Dictionary, the word used for easy is defined as, "fit for use," or "able to be used." My yoke, the Yoke that Jesus offers, perfectly designed for each of us, is so that we would become fit for God and his intention for each one of us. It provides us equipping for our mission. It provides excitement for our calls. It provides joy and peace for our journey.

In our day, we visualize and identify a yoke with a sweaty ox, forced to labor, dirty and struggling in the field. That is not the yoke that Christ is offering us. His yoke provides us the opportunity to become more. As we learn from him, and we follow his gentle guidance, as we give up our obstinence, we find our way and we find who we really are.

And we find our purpose. It is a joyful mission of Christ-like identity. Our life becomes what it was meant to be. Our actions become what keep us close to God. We become who we are supposed to be. Full of joy. At total peace. Living into a God-given life. And when we do, when we form ourselves to that yoke, everything becomes easy.

Amen.