

Sermon Proper 9 Year A  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
July 5, 2020  
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Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67      Psalm 45:10-17      Romans 17:15-25a  
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

“Come unto me, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”  
BCP, 332.

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will  
give you rest.

The same verse, from different translations, in the gospel of Matthew. The first  
translation is the one that is printed in the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer; the  
quotation is often referred to as “the comfortable words.” They are words of  
comfort, gentle words that, over time, rest in our souls. We have other such  
phrases: the Lord’s prayer; I love you; maybe “night – night,” or the words of a  
song: “You are my sunshine ....”

I think of the word travail as pertaining to physical work: the back-breaking work  
of a farmer with hand tools, of a first century fisherman in a wooden boat; of  
women providing for their families with heat for everything from a fire, clothing  
and bedding coming only from the work of their hands. Travail. The modern era  
has brought with it more types of hard work: the difficult intellectual work of  
balancing innovation with ethics; because we can do something does it mean that  
we should? How do we treat those who are ill? What is the most responsible way

to develop medicines, farm the land, use the ocean? A friend recently had the travail of developing protocol for a hospital when their resources were beyond overloaded: who would they treat, and how; with what? Travail. We all need to be refreshed.

Once again, in comfortable words from Jesus, we are shocked into turning our heads and our lives back to him. When will we learn? We are ultimately not refreshed by our many excesses, but by a first century Jewish man who is God come to earth that we might be eternally refreshed and relieved from our burdens.

“Burden” is the more recent translation of the original Greek word; burden. Do you have any? Of course. We all have burdens, and from them Jesus will give us rest. Rest is a very different word from refreshment, isn’t it? Think of God on the seventh day; God rested. And we remember that God rested not because God was tired, but in order to enjoy all of creation. I think about God’s rest being a time of refreshment – ah, look!

Comfortable words. Does anyone need comfortable words right now? Every day I hear the lament: this is hard; 2020 needs to go away; my friend, family member, colleague ... is sick. Jesus continues:

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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

We may know that a yoke is a tool of manual farming, of hard labor. A yoke is a heavy piece of wood with two farm animals, oxen or mules, are linked together in order to pull a plow. A yoke is also a series of settings on a ship that determines watertight integrity; below deck, setting ventilation and “habitability.” A ship is set for maximum survivability; a hospital is set for maximum survivability; we are seeking maximum survivability in a pandemic that is lasting longer than our patience, obedience, and systems can handle.

The answer to travail, heavy burdens, and threatened survivability ... is Jesus. The heaviest yoke I can imagine is the wood that Jesus carried, alone, to his own crucifixion. “The hard wood of the cross.” Jesus loves us all the way to HIS cross, and tells us through the centuries that his yoke is easy. I am appreciating the idea that a yoke is both this massive implement rested on one’s shoulders and that which determines maximum survivability. You remember that the stole a priest wears is a symbol of the yoke that we put on in our priesthood, a way for us to remember our work, our burden, and our role of servanthood. A stole has new

meaning when I think of it as a yoke also of habitability. In today's gut-wrenching words: can I breathe?

Jesus says "come with me." He will not take away our burdens, but he will bear them with us. Jesus is our pulling partner, our survivability core. And that word "comfort" means, "with" "strength." Musicians, think "forte!" Comfortable words give us strength to carry our yoke and to render our burdens light.

Jesus then says that his yoke is "easy." Like comfort, the word easy has context; an appropriate meaning of "easy" in this context is: "good to bear."

My yoke is good to bear. Jesus' cross was good to bear, not for him in that moment, but for us now and to eternity, for Jesus is with us, bearing all things with us. Think about your burdens ...

How might they be good to bear?

You know the answer to this one; think about your children, grandchildren, beloved pets and friends. If they are sick, do you help? Is their difficult situation far too heavy? Alone, yes. But you will pick up the phone, drive to them or to the hospital, sharing with Jesus a yoke that is good to bear.

The meaning is transformed: my yoke is good to bear and my burden is light.

Jesus' yoke was all about love, and so is ours. We are called to love one another in the way that God loves us, and to be linked to one another in such a way that our burden are lightened. We love one another in the pattern and way of Jesus.

Paul's letter is about his struggle to reconcile his past persecution of Christians and his transformation to being an ardent follower of Jesus. He took on the yoke of Jesus, and found his burdens to be quite heavy. Paul asks: "Who will rescue me?" and then answers his own question: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Yes, Paul, yes. In his time and our time,

Come unto Jesus, everyone. Enjoy God's good creation with God on the seventh day. Put on love, which is good to bear. Be comforted, friends, which is to be strengthened by Christ Jesus.

Amen and amen!