

Third Sunday in Pentecost

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RCL: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Psalm 45:10-17 or Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 LM: Zechariah 9:9-10; Psalm 145:1-2, 8-9, 10-11, 13-14; Romans 8:9, 11-13; Matthew 11:25-30

The words of Matthew 11:28-30 put an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of the believer who is healthy, well off financially, intellectually gifted, gainfully employed, and comfortably situated in life. Presumably, these are not the people to whom Jesus is speaking when he bids the weary and overburdened to come to him. But if those who have wealth and influence do nothing to ease the burdens of the oppressed, the comforting words of Jesus become a mockery of those for whom they were intended.

Consider the text: “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” (vv. 28-30). Easy? Light? Ask anyone who is poor and hungry if their life is easy, if their burden is light. Ask yourself what they are likely to make of this Gospel passage. Can they possibly believe it is intended for them? Wouldn’t we understand if they opt out, lose interest, and choose a somewhat cynical self-exclusion from the benefits promised in this optimistic message?

Unless you are content simply to blame the victim, you have to look around for what causes the physical and emotional weariness of those who suffer. You have to try to identify the source of the burdens that are crushing those who are powerless. If the causes remain unattended, the weariness will persist and the burdens will just grow heavier.

People living in poverty can’t count on miracles. Hungry people cannot eat promises. Angels are unlikely to appear on the scene to ease their burdens. Humans helping humans is the way to make things happen, both because it is a realistic approach and because “miracles” can happen in communities of good and faithful people as long as they are patient and persistent.

Jesus offers a suggestion. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,” he says. Take upon yourself his yoke, not one of your own making. His yoke is always easy, unlike the ones we fashion for ourselves or heedlessly heap upon others. “Yoke” here refers to his interpretation of the law. We can learn from Jesus his law of love and see in his actions a demonstration of the truth that love consists of deeds, not words. Learning from him, we begin to wash each other’s feet and carry one another’s burdens.

We might even think of “yoke” as a verb and let ourselves be yoked to a law that is revolutionary and new. No longer content with a reciprocal “as-you-love-yourself” kind of loving relationship to neighbor, the new commandment calls for an ethic of renunciation, an “as-I-have-loved-you” sacrificial love that leads us to lay down our lives for another.

This Gospel is not calling for heroic, once-and-for-all sacrifice. It is a gentler call to day-by-day

concern for easing the burdens of others. Where better to begin than by attending to hunger, the most urgent form of poverty? How better to address the challenge than by making a Bread-for-the-World kind of commitment to eliminating hunger through advocacy at those human, political decision points where those who are vulnerable and poor can be helped or hurt.

There was a wonderful Jesuit priest named Horace McKenna who was known as Washington, D.C.'s "Apostle to the Poor" when he died in 1982. He used to say that the Church without a social ministry would be like Christ without miracles. But, he added, "Our Lord did his miracles instantaneously at a word, but his Church, his brothers, his sisters, his fathers and mothers have to do their miracles slowly."

"Slow Miracles" is the name of the newsletter circulated by the combined soup kitchen and homeless shelter near the U.S. Capitol that bears his name.

Let this reflection close with one more saying repeated often by this saintly man: "I think we need to have marches—hunger marches, marches for the homeless, marches for peace. We need to make government realize that it should not spend our food money on armaments for war." St. Horace, pray for us!

Children's Time [LH]

Ask the children if they know what a yoke is. From a dictionary or other resource, show a picture of oxen or other animals with a yoke. It's heavy and is designed to make sure animals stay together and work together. Jesus says his yoke is "easy"! It's not a simple thing to follow Jesus, but what he means is that we are free to be his people and not be like others who have to put up with a heavier yoke. Jesus will help us be friends with him and with others, and he never gives us more than we can handle.

Musical Suggestions [LH]

Hope of the World—BP 176

Camina, Pueblo de Dios (Walk On, O People of God)—UMH 305

Lord of All Hopefulness—LBW 469

We Shall Rise Again—GC 772