

July 5, 2020 (Focus: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30)

Much asked of us in these days, so good to hear Jesus say, “come to you, all who are weary, and I will give you rest” for we all need that kind of care and compassion and comfort in these strange and difficult times.

But maybe if we are honest with ourselves, we wish he had left it there. Why go to the whole “take up the yoke” part? Aren’t we burdened enough as it is? Even if his yoke is so easy, why go there if you know we are weary?

But the truth that Jesus knew is that we are always carrying something, and he is asking us today – what are we choosing to carry? We have been reminded as of late of some of the burdens we are all carrying, as we live in our communities and our society today – burden of all those various ‘-isms,’ especially the burden of racism. And maybe we don’t see it as a burden we are carrying, because we are white and not discriminated against. Certainly for those who still believe in white supremacy, they will never see that racism is a burden that white people carry; to them it is just the right and natural way of being.

But we are at least “woke” enough to know better, I think. We are, I truly believe in our hearts, non-racist, and believe that racism is wrong, an evil that should not be. But are we antiracist? Are we woke enough that we are willing not just to say that black lives matter and native lives matter, but that we are willing to take up the yoke of actually making changes? Are we willing to give up some of our power, some of our privilege? Are we willing to work to dismantle systems and institutions that privilege us white folk at the expense of people of color, and are we willing to do the difficult work of reimagining a world where, say, people of color are not deliberately kept out of our neighborhoods, or relegated to certain jobs, or that people of color are treated differently by law enforcement?

If we are not willing to be antiracists, then we will continue to bear the yoke of racism, for it weighs us down, it keeps us all from being all that we can be in terms of loving our neighbor, all our neighbors...We know better, that change is needed, but if fear or despair or apathy keep us from helping to make the changes needed to systems and institutions that oppress, then we too are burdened...and we should see that is true for ourselves; it will continue to weigh on our spirits, as we will not fully be the loving neighbors we know we could be...We are living a fraud, a hypocrisy...at least that is how Frederick Douglass described it in his Fourth of July speech in 1852, “What to the slave is

the fourth of July?” In spite of the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th amendment, the voting rights acts, and so on that has happened since Douglass’ speech, much of what Douglass, a former slave, said over 168 year ago is still true today, that our country has great ideals, but does not always live up to them, especially for people of color. That this country has a long history of denying equal rights to Black people and native people, and does not admit to the gross injustices and cruelty to which these are subjected to every day. Yet Douglass also said that he did not despair of this country, that he believed it could do better. Just like we believe our country could do better.

NPR has a great video on this, just google it, it isn’t very long. In that video the descendants of Frederick Douglass, all in their teens and twenties, read his speech. At the end one of them commented that even though things were still bad for Black people, that he still had hope, he had to have hope, for “pessimism is the tool of white oppression.” Let us not be the tool of oppression, and let us not feel the tool of pessimism at work in our souls to discourage us from the call to love our neighbors, all our neighbors, especially the oppressed, especially the Native and Black neighbors and other neighbors of color. Let us have optimism that though the race is long for making this a more just and equitable and loving society and world, that it still can be done, if we all take up the yoke of working together for change.

A yoke is a tool to keep a team together, to help with farming and other heavy duty jobs – together the team can do more than two separate can do...the sum is greater than the two parts, as they work together on a common goal.

Jesus’ yoke is likewise not about the burden, but the sharing of the burden lightening it for each, and by working together we are more than the sum of our parts. Jesus’ yoke is invisible; it is the love that we have for one another creating a connection between us, that makes us a team. Under Jesus’ yoke of mutual love, when you are happy I am happy, when you cry I cry with you. Under Jesus’ yoke, I cannot feel rich until you are rich, I cannot have peace until you have peace, I cannot have justice until you have justice. Take up my yoke, not just us individually – all of you, together, take up the yoke, help one another, see one another, love one another...the burden is substantial, yes, for these are important things, but the burden is not as heavy as we might think, and making the load light for others can actually make the load feel light for ourselves. And that is the good news about the kingdom of God for us today.

Children's Message

Who is Christina Koch?

US astronaut; just set record earlier this year by spending 328 days in space; longest single space flight by woman; once got back, in quarantine to debrief, but then coronavirus struck...you thought you had it bad in terms of self-isolation...what could we learn from astronauts about living in close quarters for extended periods of time:

Expeditionary Behavior – if following guidelines, then doing “good EB”

- Communication: share info, feelings; discuss if things weren't what they thought they would be (we have a lot of disagreements when we guess or assume how someone is feeling, instead of checking in with them)
- Leadership/followership: lead by example, ask questions, offer solutions (teamwork takes leaders and followers, and sometimes we are one and sometimes we are the other)
- Self-care: hygiene, get sleep, nutrition, manage time and manage stuff (no easier way to ruin team work than by crankiness, messiness, and BO)
- Team care: patience, respect, encourage one another; check others for fatigue, sickness, poor nutrition, supplies (not just about how I am feeling, but also how the rest of my team is feeling that will help us work and live together well)
- Group living: cooperate, not compete; respect roles, responsibilities, workload; be accountable; praise freely; keep calm; respect different opinions, cultures, perceptions (its about how we interact)

In a way, we are on an expedition...into uncharted territory...are we doing “good EB”? Why should we do “good EB”? It is a way to love one another.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Thank you God, for your blessings. Sometimes in the midst of the busyness, or in the midst of the quiet isolation, or in the midst of uncertainty, we forget to take stock and say, yes, we are blessed, not in every way, but in truly deep and meaningful ways, we are blessed, and we are grateful.

Sometimes we feel stuck in a rut of pity for what we don't have, what we can't do, or a rut of worry about what we may get or what the future may or may not hold...help us to see things as they are, accept what we cannot change, do what we can, and persevere when needed...help us to be resilient in the face of the long haul that we are facing.

Thank you, gracious God, for your compassion and care and healing touch for those in need, body, mind, and spirit.

Thank you for your Spirit, blessing us, and renewing our spirits that we may answer your call to be your heart and your hands in the world, that all may be blessed...Amen.