

Written Copy: Matthew 11:27-30 “What is this Yoke and Burden?”

18th Sunday @ Pentecost: LWML Sunday

Sunday, October 1st, 2023

Text: Matthew 11:27-30

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The text's intent

To show that only Christ can reveal the Father and His reign and rule to us in our hearts through the Gospel. He does this whenever His word is preached, read, and sung showing mankind the burden of trying to save themselves and live apart from God, and then showing them how Jesus has done all that is necessary to save us and make us right with God. Only Christ can call us into His reign and rule and take the burden of being right with God from us. And as we live out our Christian lives, we do so yoked to Christ by the Spirit so that we are not left on our own to shoulder the heavy load of our continued sin and the fallenness of this world. His Spirit does the bulk of the work through His continued work to keep us in repentant faith working through the means of grace. And He gives to us gifts and talents for us to use and opportunities to use them to be a part of extending that reign and rule of Christ to others as His Church Our small part is to avail ourselves of the means He uses to grow in our faith and knowledge of Jesus and the completeness of His salvation and keep us in that repentant faith. And to make use of those gifts He gives to us and the opportunity He provides to extend that reign and rule to others through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Focus Statement:

Jesus' reign and rule can only be made known to us, and we can only be called into it through the Spirit working through the Gospel Message. Only He can provide what is needed to enter and remain in His reign on earth. As we live out our lives as His Church His Spirit works to pull the bulk of the load to keep us in repentant faith and to serve as His Gospel witness through the mission of the Church, He calls us to and provides opportunity for.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

As we read Jesus' invitation to take His yoke upon us we can fall into two different errors: that we must do something in order to be saved, or that He does all the work and requires nothing of us as His Church in mission. We can wonder, “What is this yoke? What is our burden?”

What the hearer should do as a result:

Realize that as Christians we have the burden of living in repentant faith and service as His Church. We do our part by availing ourselves to the means of grace by which the Spirit keeps us in repentant faith and grows our knowledge of Christ and His all sufficient work of salvation, and use the gifts and opportunities He provides to be a part of His Gospel mission to build one another's faith and reach out to the lost.

Subject Sentence: Yoked with Christ We Serve as His Church

Introduction:

As I was reading the Gospel Lesson for today did anything stick out in your mind? It's a familiar reading that you have encountered before. It was our appointed Gospel Lesson back on the 2nd Sunday of July, but I didn't preach on it then. It is the appointed Gospel Lesson for LWML Sunday this year. And as I was reading through it and thinking about it my mind came to rest on two of the verses. Perhaps yours did too. But if not I bring your attention to them now. **Matthew 11:29-30** ²⁹ **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** ³⁰ **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

First of all, Jesus is giving us a command to **"Take my yoke upon you"**. You could also translate this as **"Pick up My yoke and put it over your shoulders."** Here Jesus is seemingly commanding us to do something in our life of faith, and as Good Lutherans we should always be on the lookout for any hint of a message being preached that is "Salvation by works". And then there is Jesus saying, **"His burden is light."** Well, the fact that its light is good news. But what is this burden? When we think of burdens in our Christian walk we think of sins. Is Christ really telling us we now have to shoulder the burden of sin?

NO! Especially when we are talking about the burden of sin that would keep us from being saved, having a place in His gracious reign and rule, being a member of His Church, His body on earth. What then is this yoke, and this burden that it light? To figure this out let's look at the context for these verses.

Context for These Troubling Verses: Jesus Call into His Reign

Our Gospel Reading directly follows Jesus discussing how many of the towns in Galilee are filled with people who refuse to believe in Him. They refuse to believe even though they've heard His preaching and His parables, and they've seen His miraculous healings, His power over Satan in the casting out of demons, and even His authority over death in the raising of Jairus daughter. They refused to believe that John the Baptist was the Way Preparer for the Messiah, even though he fulfilled the prophetic word in how he dressed, acted, and the message he preached. Since they refused to believe in John, they were also refusing to believe in the One John came to prepare the way for, the One he pointed to, Jesus Himself. Jesus said that if those Old Testament cities like Sodom and Gomorrah which suffered God's divine wrath had heard and witnessed what the Galilean towns did in Jesus' ministry they would've repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. With all this it might seem by human standards and judgment that Jesus' mission to bring His reign and rule to bear was failing miserably. But things in Jesus reign and rule are often not what they appear to be by our human standards.

Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children;

Jesus is pointing out that no one can choose on his own to be a part of Jesus’ reign and rule. All people are born outside of this gracious reign and rule, born into under the reign and rule of Satan as sinners. They can’t stop sinning. And to be a member of Jesus’ reign and rule you must be declared to be perfect, which no one can ever be on their own. All those who think they can, who look to their good works in this world, or who their parents are, or how often they attend Church, and because of these things think that will square things away with God are sorely mistaken. All those who are trusting in any other name beside Jesus, whether it be Allah, or Buddha, or even a Jesus of their own making and imagination that no longer cares about sin because it’s all forgiven, for all these the message of the Jesus reign and rule is hidden from them.

But all who hear the word of God and realize who they are by themselves, like little children who cannot provide for the basic necessities of life, but instead depend on parents for food, shelter, warmth, safety and security; all those who look to God for all that is needed physically and spiritually, to these the message of Christ is revealed by the Gospel. The law shows us that we cannot fulfill it good enough to be declared right with God and welcomed into His reign and rule. For all the successes we might have they are cancelled out by the overwhelming multitude of failures. For those of us who confess this is who we are as revealed to be by God’s law, the Father reveals who Jesus is for us in the Gospel.

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

It’s in the Gospel Message sent by the Father revealed through the power of the Holy Spirit that we learn who Christ is for us as needy helpless infants. He came and lived the perfect life of obedience that we never could by keeping all the laws and fulfilling the plan and will of the Father perfectly. Then He gave up His life on the cross to be the atoning sacrifice that cancels the debt of sin for all mankind, so that no one should live apart from God forever, but instead live in His gracious reign and rule now in this world and forever in eternal life. He reaches out through the Holy Spirit working in this Gospel Message to you. He says to you “Come to me, you who are laboring under the load of sin, the load of trying to be good enough on your own and failing. Come to me and receive my gift of forgiveness that comes through the Gospel Message that tells you I’ve done it all for you, everything necessary to make you right with God. Through My Spirit I plant the faith you need that removes you from Satan’s rule and firmly plants you into my gracious reign and rule now, in this life, and forever in eternal life. In all this Jesus is the One who does it all, takes our sin, and gives us the rest that is complete forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. And that is the Gospel Message that we as Lutherans hold fast to; right? RIGHT!

What is the Yoke We Take Up? What is the Burden?

Matthew 11:29-30 ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

With all that under our belt, let's now look at those troubling verses. First of all, what is this yoke? A yoke was a wooden bar that was fitted over a draft animal's neck used to enable several animals to work together to pull a cart, or a plow. In Jesus day, a farmer didn't always have enough oxen to pull a plow or a wagon. So, yokes were designed to join together two animals of unequal strength so that they could both work together to get the job done according to the relative strengths and weaknesses of each animal. Yokes were designed so that the stronger ox and a weaker donkey could both work together and with their combined strengths complete the task without the weaker donkey dying of exhaustion.

In Jesus illustrations He calls us to take up His yoke, or for us to be yoked to Him. Now this cannot and will not happen unless you are already welcomed into His kingdom by grace through faith. Jesus doesn't yoke Himself with unbelievers. He is describing how we are to live out our life of faith in Him as the Church. He doesn't call us to faith and then send us out on our own to flounder and fail. We are yoked with Him through His indwelling Spirit. As we live out our life of faith in Him, He does not pull us harder and faster than we can go. He is not a ruthless taskmaster. He realizes both our strengths and weaknesses and works with us, encouraging us and supporting us in the work He has for us to do. He does the gently and lovingly.

Well, that leaves us with the burden Jesus mentions. It's light, but it's there. And that is troubling since we confess and believe that He completely lifts the burden of sin from us by His work of grace. And this is true. But once again we are talking about our lives lived out here on earth as His Church. In this sinful broken world, there are plenty of burdens we encounter: the brokenness of those around us whose lives touch ours through anger and quarreling, children who divorce, have alcohol and drug problems. We ourselves deal with depression, aging, illnesses such as cancer and COVID. The brokenness of the world around us with natural disasters, possible government shut down looming 45 days in the future, cost of living increases. All of these things outside of us, plus the consequences for our own sinful thoughts, words, actions: all these are burdens that we must take up as we live out our lives in this world.

But we don't shoulder them alone. Christ is there with us to help walk us through all the troubles in this life. Some of these Jesus by His Almighty power removes, but others He does not. Even so we can continue to walk through this world with Him helping us to carry these loads. Now remember, many times the yoke was designed for two animals of unequal strength, with the stronger doing more of the work. Jesus is the stronger, He does the bulk of the work in our daily burden carrying. He knows what the future holds and how our problem will be resolved. He is at work in ways we could never imagine and in ways we may not realize. What is our part of the load to carry? To use whatever He has placed in our hands: our time, talents, treasures to carry it. As we do that we lean on Him by faith, trusting that He will not let us be crushed or fall away from faith in Him. In fact, He uses these burdens to make us stronger, to learn from Him and grow our faith, and thereby draw closer to Him in our faith relationship.

Yoked Together With Fellow Believers As His Church

1 Peter 2:5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

In our Christians lives we are yoked not just individually with Jesus, but with one another. Together as the Church we serve as a holy priesthood that offers spiritual sacrifices as our worship and service to Christ, the Cornerstone, the Head of the Church. These spiritual sacrifices are the call for us to serve one another and the lost by sacrificing some of our time, talents, and treasures. We do this best when we are yoked together in a way that makes our individual talents and abilities useful service to the mission Jesus has given the Church. Together members are serving this day with their individual talents and abilities to provide this Worship Service. Yet it is Jesus who does the bulk of the work as He is present offering His gifts of grace through Word and Sacrament.

It is together we best serve through ministry events outside of this Church building like those who helped with the Shred-It event yesterday. Some helped meet, greet, and collect money. Others helped with planning. Others helped with posting flyers and telling others about the event. In all this different people served in different ways with different talents to shoulder the burden of ministry given to us by Christ. The same is true for our ministry with Franklin Avenue Mission. Some serve by shopping, preparing and cooking the food, others by cleaning up, still others go down and help serve, being the smiling face of Jesus to those who need the Gospel just as badly as we do.

And when it comes to willingness to serve, we are blessed here at Lamb of God to have an active LWML Chapter. Through the money they raise they support Pregnancy Crisis Resource Center, POBLO International which has an active ministry to Muslims in this country and the Detroit area, they help support James Rush serving in a missionary capacity teaching English in South Korea. It is these ladies who provide much of the help for our service to Franklin Avenue Mission by helping cook the food, And it is they who make the food for our funeral dinners, as well as being involved in the setting up and tearing down. Yoked with them Lamb of God can serve in many ways to bring the Gospel to the lost around us.

Conclusion

When it comes to our being called into the reign and rule of Christ, His kingdom, the Church; that is only done by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. Only Jesus work for us makes us good enough to be a part of God's reign and rule now and into eternal life. But when it comes to living out our life of faith as the Church in mission, we have some work to do. But we don't do it alone, we live and serve yoked with Christ and one another. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus does the bulk of this work, providing what is needed as far as our time, talents, and treasures to make us each yokemates in service to His Church. His Spirit is at work to keep us in repentant faith and to grow that faith, working through Word and Sacrament even as we suffer through the burdens of this broken sinful world. Jesus is there with us, walking side-by-side with us to make sure that none of these burdens crush us, but that we remain in faith throughout our service to Him in this world and all the way to eternal life to come. Amen.