

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30^{v vi}

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."

^v About the Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Chapters 11-12 mark a turning point in the Gospel of Matthew. Chapters 1-10 have established the authority of Jesus in word and deed and his gift of that authority to his disciples; chapters 11-28 will chronicle the rejection of Jesus' authority by the false Israel and his description and designation of the true Israel.

Today's reading summarizes these themes; Jesus has witnessed to the rejection of both John the Baptist and himself (11:7-19), and has condemned those who have seen his "deeds of power" yet not repented (11:20-24). Jesus goes on to praise God for the divine wisdom that hid these truths from the unrepentant. True recognition of spiritual reality comes from God (16:17), but God is neither capricious nor insensitive to people's lives in disclosing spiritual

truth. The “infants,” the “simple” (New English Bible), are open to receiving it.

Verses 28-30 are found only in Matthew. The “yoke” in the Old Testament stood for servitude under the king (1 Kings 12:4) or under a foreign conqueror (Isaiah 14:25). It symbolized then, not the means of bearing a burden, but the burden itself. The “yoke of the law” was God’s covenant, (Jeremiah 2:20, 5:5) identified also with Wisdom (Sirach 6:24-25). The rabbis spoke of the “yoke of the law” as giving rest and reward (Sirach 51:26-30), but to the poor and the outcast it was burdensome (23:1-4; Acts 15:10). Jesus promises a yoke that is “easy” and “light.”

The whole passage unites both apocalyptic and wisdom themes. Jesus is the One who reveals God to humanity; in Jesus are offered the knowledge of God (Isaiah 11:9) and the Sabbath rest promised in the last days (Hebrews 4:1-10). Jesus is himself both the teacher and the lesson. He is “gentle and humble in heart” and calls us to accept him and become like him.

^{vi} **Reflection and Response**

When Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon us, we may have trouble visualizing his meaning. After all, our water comes running from the tap with the twist of a handle. What do we know of shouldering a wooden yoke to carry heavy buckets of water home from a village well?

Maybe a backpack would serve our imaginations better. After all, we have seen backpacks used to carry books, running shoes and other paraphernalia. Now imagine a backpack on our own back, one that we can stuff as we choose.

First goes in our self-image, of course, the idea of ourselves as the successful, self-reliant centers of our small worlds. Next we need the material goods that go with our self-image, our carefully chosen home, clothes, and luxuries, for which we are even willing to go into debt.

The backpack feels uncomfortably heavy already, but we are not finished. We need a full array of defenses to protect our self-image from attack. After all, we cannot allow ourselves to be questioned by guilt--indeed, we want no questions at all! Especially not the kind that whisper, “Are you really happy living this way?”

The same materials fill our national backpacks, too. First we choose our national myth, seeing ourselves as the strong, wise, self-reliant leader among nations. We insist on our standard of

living, even if we have to provide it at the expense of third-world poverty and hunger.

When we have chosen all this, are we likely to respond to the picture of God's king drawn by the prophet Zechariah? Are we ready to welcome One who comes in peace and humility, putting an end to our weapons and wars?

Perhaps we cannot respond until our backs groan under the heavy load we carry. Then, weary of the burden, perhaps we can hear Jesus say, "Let it go. Give me your heavy pack and take mine to wear instead."

Reluctantly we take Jesus' pack upon us. He has filled it with unaccustomed goods--instead of a swollen sense of self, he gives humility; instead of more and more material wealth, he gives the riches of compassion; and instead of an array of weapons, he gives a single spirit of vulnerability.

Instead of a burden of demands, we find we are given the support of the Spirit. Paul reminds us that the Spirit is given for our help, to set us free from the burden of sin and to pray on our behalf when all other prayer is impossible.

We shrug our shoulders under the pack. Can this really be all we need in life? Can it so fill our hearts that we will never again stretch out our hands to the more familiar goods of pride, greed, and anger?

"Take my burden," says Jesus. Take and see. This is all you need--all you ever really wanted.

Quietly consider:

What burdens is Jesus helping me bear today?