

July 05, 2020 Sermon
Matthew 11:16-19,25-30

I do a lot of reading before I put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, as it were, for a Sunday sermon. One of the first things I read was that Americans are more unhappy now than they have been in the last 50 years.

My brain immediately went into sarcasm mode as I thought, well, yeah, why shouldn't they be? Look where we are! The year 2020 hit us with a vengeance. We might have gotten a couple months in there without issue, but once March hit, we may as well call it a year.

Health care systems were and are being hit hard. People are being told to not be quite as social as we would like to be. We haven't been together in worship for quite a few months, and still there were anger issues in coming back because for the sake of OTHERS we can't quite go back to normal yet, and let's be honest, when we're angry, it's because we're thinking about what WE need and want and *not* what **others** need or want.

I was saddened, as well as angered, when we couldn't be together to finish out Lent and celebrate Easter. I honestly thought we would only be out for two or three weeks and we would be back together again. Not only did I think we would celebrate Easter, but then I got my hopes up for Pentecost, and when that didn't pan out, well...eventually, my anger subsided and I became *worried* about when we would **ever** get back together again.

But here is what I've seen in people and learned about anger; there are two kinds of anger. There is an anger that exists for change. A need is seen in society, people get angry about injustices, so anger can cause change for society and then the anger eventually abates.

Our society sat for quite some time...in front of televisions and social media outlets and we saw what was happening in society and some people got angry, decided to make a change, and I really feel that change is coming. And even though I *feel change* is coming, there is still anger, but some things in this world have been messed up for quite some time, so it will take a bit for the anger to subside.

The other kind of anger is *permanent* anger. Anger that emanates a hopelessness. An anger that is not healthy. The kind of anger we see directed toward John the Baptist and Jesus, by others in our gospel lesson this morning. When we see this kind of anger in others, it causes us to say, "Oh yeah...that's so and so...they are NEVER happy!" (If that last remark stung you, you may want to check into that)

Jesus says, "But to what will I compare this generation? (as a side note, Jesus is talking about *his* generation at the time, but this can also be OUR generation, here and now) 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.'"

Continuing on, we read today, "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!'"

It's one of those "can't win for losing" kind of things. Isn't it interesting that Jesus is described by the company he keeps? Everything is all hunky dory as long as people see Jesus in that healing, teaching mode, but the minute he's seen with someone that doesn't look or act like us, then game on!

And people become angry. They don't see the Messiah for who he really is. They don't see him for who he is because they're looking inward. They're being self-centered, thinking that this man is only for them...how could he possibly associate with *those* who are not like *us*?

Jesus says, "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

Wisdom has nothing to do with age, by the way.

“Come to me,” says Jesus. “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” Jesus says, put all of that earthly stuff down. Empty your hands of things you can do nothing about. Let go of the anger you have that is due to thinking only about YOUR wants and needs and not the wants and needs of OTHERS.

Take my yoke upon you...you know this yoke thing is a throwback to the days of yoking oxen together to work in the fields. The yoke was made in such a way as to not rub and chafe the animals while they were working together. Yoking two oxen made work easier than having one animal do all the work, so yoking yourself to Jesus is meant to make your life a bit easier.

Jesus says Yoke yourself to me and learn from me, because I can show you what it is you need to know. I can help you in the wisdom department because with wisdom comes clarity of vision. Jesus says I can help you see that you are not in this world alone, that you are here to help one another, to walk with one another in the love that I have shown to you.

Learning to be wise can help you *deal* with your anger. *Wisdom* can help you see what needs to be seen and can help bring order to chaos. In wisdom, we can be *humbled*, we can be *protected*, and we can find *favor* with God, but we’ve got to *attach* ourselves to God in Christ. We’ve got to *put on that yoke*, give up part of ourselves...maybe the angry part...and learn from him. In other words, we need to be a true disciple.

We are made in God’s image, and so we must *share* God’s *grace and mercy* with others and look toward *possibilities* rather than seeing and naming what we think are *short-comings* in others. Maybe what we’re seeing in others is the very thing we don’t like about ourselves, and so if we yoke ourselves to Jesus we can live into a new idea...a new vision...a new way of seeing ourselves in a world that can more easily be angry than loving.

Rolf Jacobsen is a professor of theology at Luther Seminary in Minnesota. When he was a young child, he contracted cancer and had to have both legs amputated. He shared that those who hear this story ask if he was ever angry and even why he isn’t angry to this day.

He explains quite simply that he worked hard to live into his identity with Christ, yoking himself to Jesus, and that is what helped him live without the anger. It is also what helped him take any anger he may have had, and learn to make a change. Life in a wheelchair is way more restricting than life inside your home for a few months. Living into our Christianity can help us put a new perspective on things.

I used the last part of this gospel lesson as the basis for my sermon at Kay Shackelford's funeral. "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."

I used this because Kay always told people, dealing with problems to "give it to God." To me, she will be remembered for that saying, because she was pretty good at giving it to God. She was a pretty wise woman, and I don't believe her age had anything to do with it. I believe it was because she yoked herself to God in Christ.

When Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest," he is telling us to trust the presence and the promise of God...and if we do that, then we are more willing to be peaceful and forgiving. The anger will subside and life will not be as difficult as before.

We have all been through the proverbial ringer of late. Most of us can fall under the categories of weary or angry or maybe we're just sick and tired of being sick and tired of the things of this world. We belong to Christ, and this is Christ's church...not ours...and so we yoke ourselves to him for wisdom and grace and mercy.

Jesus says, "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." Amen.