

Sermon for July 3rd 2011 Matthew 11

Jesus said to the crowd “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another ‘we played the flute for you and you did not dance, we wailed and you did not mourn’.

In order to understand this verse a description of what the children played in the market place is in order. In Jesus’ day the children would play a game in the market place – there were two groups of children – one proposing to play the game of weddings, the other proposing to play the game of funerals – in this case Jesus is saying the generation he is speaking of is reacting like children in the market place not responding to the request to dance to the flute playing of the wedding game or morn to the wailing of the funeral game

Jesus goes on to compare the parable of the children’s game to that generation’s response to himself and to John the Baptist. John’s demeanor as somber, neither eating nor drinking almost funeral like and Jesus demeanor – celebratory, eating drinking at the wedding and other celebrations – the peoples response – they absolutely refused to play that game. This generation to whom Jesus refers refuses to acknowledge the monumental displays of God’s work in the world.

The kingdom of God had broken through to the here and now on earth and the people were not going to have any part of it.

So Jesus ends the parable with a proverb of sorts. He says, Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. In other words, you can sit out of the game if you want to thinking you are wise and you know what the real messiah is going to look and act like, but while you are on the sidelines, the blind are seeing, the deaf are hearing, the lepers are being healed, and the poor are hearing the music and dancing to the beat.

In other words, the proof of the kingdom is in what is happening in the world through Jesus. That is the essence of wisdom. Divine wisdom is the emanation of God’s Truth. The lowly in Jesus had both joy and power: the Pharisees, growing harder in pride hand clung to ways that were doomed.

Then Jesus begins a prayer to God the father thanking God for keeping these things hidden from the wise and revealed to the infants. He thanks God for gathering around him, during his difficult ministry, a community of the lowly, the poor, and the weak, even if this means rejection by the mighty, the rich, and the self-sufficient.

The spiritual infants of Jesus’ day are the ones willing to dance to the flute playing and morn to the wailing and they are precisely the ones who can see the magnificence of God being shown through the life of Christ –while those who see themselves as having worldly wisdom and are in effect blinding themselves from seeing God’s work at all.

The passage ends with Jesus making a heartfelt invitation to all knowing that the ones who are willing to dance and morn are going to at some point become weary. Jesus realizes the challenge of attempting to live up to the world's standards.

His reference of a yoke is aimed at those who are struggling under the Pharisees and scribes interpretation of Torah or Jewish Law. At that time the Jewish leaders were teaching that the faithful should take on the yoke of Torah. A yoke as most of you know is a wooden device that is used on oxen usually for burdensome work and that work is the same burden the yoke of torah would cause under the scribes and Pharisees interpretation.

But when Jesus says take my yoke upon you there is clearly a difference. Jesus says his yoke is easy and his burden is light, not because there is little to do or the way is safely paved.

To the contrary, there is a cross to be carried. The yoke of Jesus is easy and the burden made light because it is the way of God and it is profoundly satisfying while at the same time restful to the human soul.

Another thing to remember is a yoke is usually made to fit two oxen – so it means we are locked in with Jesus – it means we have to go where Jesus goes – which means we are definitely going to be called to places that sometimes make us unsure, and uncomfortable,

But we must remember, that Jesus is with us, next to us.

Yes there will be work, but rather than that work that is so burdensome – working beside Jesus allows one to experience all of life both weeping and dancing while bringing rest to weary souls.

There was a time several years ago, while I was interning at a hospital as a chaplain during seminary that I look back on and see that without this yoke of Jesus I never would have made it through. I believe the best way for you to really get an understanding of what happened back then is to read you a portion of my journal in which I wrote of my experience in the form of a prayer.

This is my journal entry from 06/24/05

“Thank you lord for your strength, courage, calm and love that has sustained me over the last 24 hours. I have experienced, seen, smelled and touched so much. 6 deaths, beginning with a baby who died at 34 hours. Reese was her name. I held her and blessed her and you helped me. I could not have done that without you. Then the tragic car accident that brought the family to the emergency room. Grandma was killed and I was there when the family was told. Thank you Lord that the children (Dylan 4) and Maddie (2) were OK. They brought some joy in the midst of such tragedy. There were 3 deaths in the ICU after the call from the Emergency Department. I blessed each one with your help. I felt calm and at peace and I know this was all because of you. The last call in the middle of the night was tough for me. I was tired, the drive long and the hospital room smelled bad. I closed my eyes and I prayed for Bill and the people who loved him. It was you good lord who brought me through it all and I thank you with all my heart.”

Six years later I still remember that day like it was yesterday and I am glad for that.

Because it continually reminds me that God's work is not easy but when our work is motivated by a passionate desire to see God's kingdom realized in this world we do indeed find rest deep in our souls. Even amidst wailing and mourning we find rest. We find a peace that truly does pass all understanding.

There is something profound about being aware of need, something about knowing that one cannot depend upon one's own strength alone, that opens us to the good of God's gift of mercy. This is captured in one of my favorite verses from the gospel of John and in one of my favorite contemporary Christian songs by a group called For Him-

The verse from John says "my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. The stanza from the song is "where there is faith there is a voice calling keep walking your not alone in this world".

My prayer today is that we are able to take on the yoke of Christ in order to ease whatever burden it is that is weighing us down individually or collectively.

My prayer is that we may allow our hearts to be open to Christ's desire of us and realize that by opening our hearts to God's way we will both mourn when we see wailing and dance when we hear the flute and weep when we see weeping or dancing we will know the peace and rest Jesus talks of here, deep within our own souls in order that we may thrive on that food and keep on walking knowing we are not alone in this world.