



# SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*A Proper 9, Matthew 11:16-19*

*St. Mark's, Little Rock, 7-9-17*

*Danny Schieffler*

You know the great commandment--

to love the LORD your God with all your heart,

with all your soul

and with all your mind.

But how many of us

have heard of

the Great Invitation?

In the days of Jesus

To be yoked to the Law was supposed to be life-giving

but for many

because of the way Torah was practiced

the yoke of the law

had become a burden.

Ten commandments

had multiplied into 613 laws

not counting the many different interpretations

added by the Pharisees.

For example, in the next chapter of Matthew after today's lesson

Jesus and his disciples

will have a run in with the Pharisees

The disciples are hungry on the Sabbath

but the only food available

is grain growing in a field.

And you remember what the law

said about harvesting grain on the Sabbath.

Do not do it.

And by the end of Matthew's gospel

Jesus is speaking plainly

about the burden of being yoked to the law.

He tells the crowd

'Beware of the Scribes and Pharisees.

For they tie up heavy burdens

and lay them on the shoulders of others

but they themselves

are unwilling

to lift a finger.

In our own day, however,

its not being yoked to the law

that's a burden

but there are other yokes

--especially the yoke of the world.

Super size sounded like a pretty good idea a few years ago

But when it starts happening to your do list

Or to your job

Or to your kid's activities

Or your list of medicines

Or your appointments to keep

Or the myriad other expectations

that the world now places upon people.

Well,

if even a good thing like God's law

can be turned into a burden

how much more

the ways of the world.

Networks of communication

have been a tremendous boon to humankind

but not without their cost.

Now round the clock news coverage

Emails., text messages

And notificatioins

bring disturbing messages and images

not only into our living room

but into the bedroom

A lot cells phones

Get looked in the middle of the night.

And it happens every day.

And is there anybody  
Who is not weary  
of the division that exists in our country

We may not be yoked to the Torah any more.  
But it seems to me the yokes of this world  
can become a burden too.

And yet I believe this is precisely why  
The living Christ is so relevant for today

For in the Great Invitation  
Jesus offers a clear alternative  
to us and to the whole world.

Come unto me  
all you that are weary  
and carrying heavy burdens,  
and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke  
upon you,  
and learn from me.  
For my yoke is easy  
and my burden is light.

What makes Jesus' yoke so different?  
I think it's partly because  
when Jesus says  
learn from me,  
he doesn't just mean  
learn from my teaching.

The Aramaic word Jesus chose for disciple

doesn't mean pupil

it means apprentice

So we learn not only from Jesus' teaching

but also by watching

You see the yoke that Jesus talks about

is the yoke that Jesus himself wears.

And in fact,

like two oxen,

Jesus wears the yoke with us.

Last summer

I was planning a fishing trip to a place

In which I knew I would need to cast farther

And I had gotten rusty and out of practice

And so I asked a friend

Who I knew to be a good fly caster

If he could help me.

I knew I could learn a lot simply by watching a video

And I have done several times

But with someone right there with me

Some Who could see what I was doing

And perhaps show me the right how to do it

With a little practice

I could cast farther

And accurately.

First he wanted to watch how I was already casting

Then he showed me drills

That I could practice on my own.

But when I still having trouble

Turning what I saw him do

Into what I should do

He finally,

To took hold of my fly rod

And had me put hand on top of his

And he did casting for me

And I could feel in my own hand

How it should it be down

In other words

We did it together.

And I thought myself

Wow

its so much easier

when someone does it with you.

And in an instant

I realized this is what it means to be yoked with Jesus.

It means to live each day

knowing that Jesus is with you

upholding you

and helping you to face every challenge

if that's what it takes.

For Jesus doesn't merely invite us to take up his yoke  
he wears it with us.

He shares our burdens.

And he empowers us to say no to the yokes

That do not matter

And yes to things that do

The things that bring the world life and joy

And so in those times when we are tired from life

or burdened by the yokes of this world

Jesus is right there to make the load lighter.

I can't tell you how many times

I've awakened in the morning

with what felt like a big weight on my shoulders

But I can tell you that just as many times

the weight has been lifted through prayer.

Sometimes afterwards

the troubles are still there,

but more importantly

so is Jesus

And that makes all the difference

because in the presence of God

heavy things

don't seem nearly so heavy anymore.

For in the yoke of Jesus

things are put in their proper perspective

under God.

Is there anyone here today

Feeling burdened

Or tired

Is there something worrying you

Or weighing you down.

Then listen again to the Great Invitation of Jesus

Come to me

all you that are weary

And carrying heavy burdens,

And I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you,

and learn from me.

For my yoke is easy

and my burden is light.