

## Being Yoked to Christ and One Another

(Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30)

Sermon delivered by The Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia  
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 9, 2017

In the name of one God – creator, redeemer and sustainer. Amen.

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

Over the past seven days, I’ve lived into this invitation in an entirely new way. If there’s anything to make one feel weary and burdened – **very** weary and **very** burdened – it’s moving. No matter how well organized things seemed to be; no matter how much planning and advanced packing my family and I did; no matter how many times I triple- and quadruple-checked the arrangements and arrival times of the crew and truck: it still wore me out.

It frustrated me. And at moments, it made me angry.

I’m sure some of it is a “control thing.” I want my things packed a certain way, loaded a certain way, and delivered at a particular time. Despite knowing how much time and effort it takes to unpack boxes and put furniture in the perfect spot, I unrealistically want it all finished yesterday. I want to be able to rest and enjoy the new surroundings on my own time without all the stress that went into getting the family and our belongings from Falls Church to Berryville.

But in focusing on the weariness and burdensome nature of moving, I disregarded a later verse: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.”

Put simply, “Don’t try and do it all yourself.”

And whether I realized it or not at the time, I wasn’t doing it myself. The family was there with me. I had a great moving broker who was walking with me through the difficulties of dealing with a move that somehow wasn’t local but wasn’t quite interstate, either. There were so many of you who offered prayers and support and offers to come by the house whenever we needed, day or night, to help unpack or move or simply to be given a chance to breathe.

I was given the yoke of many, and I learned a lot.

Much of what I learned dealt with what a yoke actually does. I envisioned teams of oxen dragging wagons across wide open prairies, or of animals joined together and pulling a plow or tiller to loosen up the earth for new crops. I saw them working together to make the load lighter.

But as I discovered, yoking teams together doesn’t make the load lighter. Indeed, taking on the yoke that Christ is offering doesn’t make our own loads any lighter. By taking this yoke, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, Jesus “lightens our load by ***showing us better how to carry it.***”

If you stop and think about it, there are instances throughout the Old and New Testaments of difficult circumstances being shared. The circumstances didn’t go away, but the fact that there were people

sharing their burden – people yoking themselves to one another – meant that they were able to carry them in a different way.

At the time of the flood, Noah didn't build and fill the ark alone, nor did he have to endure the destruction of the world in solitude. His family was with them, waiting out the storm and the receding waters and trusting in the guiding hand of God. The death and rebirth of creation was a burden they faced together.

We think of the disciples being sent out two by two into the surrounding towns and villages to share the good news. Even Jesus knew that their reception would not always be kind, and I can't help but think that in many places they were on the receiving end of scorn and derision. But they went through it together; the burden of being rejected by the people wasn't lighter, but it was endured because it was a shared experience.

We each have burdens in our lives, burdens of health or finance or relationship, burdens of body, mind or spirit. And it is important to remember that as we struggle with those burdens, the yoke Christ offers can help shift those burdens, just as a yoke makes it easier to carry water from the well – supporting two jugs on shoulders rather than trying to figure out how to carry them one at a time. But this yoke isn't just for some of us. The call of Jesus to bring our burdens to him isn't for anyone; it is for everyone. As one of my favorite theologians Karl Barth wrote, this call applies “to those who are retiring in their relation to God and man, those who are at an end of their own resources in both respects, those who are at their wits' end in both respects.”

And we should remember that despite the own difficulties or challenges in our lives, we each possess a yoke that we can offer to others. Family members, friends, neighbors and even many we see on a daily basis but don't know may have their own burdens causing great struggles. We are called to help – to help those who walk through the doors of this church or Bishop's Chapel, those who vocalize a call for help or show their burdens simply through the pain and exhaustion reflected in their faces.

We have yokes to share – our hands, our hearts, our love, and our prayers. And perhaps the biggest yoke we have is our faith, the faith we have in the one who created us and gave us life, the one who offered us redemption without any strings attached. The yoke that we accepted from Christ to change the way we carry our burdens, and now the yoke that we can offer to others to change the way they carry theirs.

Jesus had perhaps the heaviest burden of all, coming to dwell among humanity, part of the perfect Holy Trinity here to live among the imperfection of the world. As Barth said, the call to us for rest and strength comes from “One who is subject ... like the weary and the heavy-laden, the man who finally will bear a cross and die on the cross.”

But just as God gave him a yoke to shift his burden – the yoke of angels ministering to him in the wilderness, the yoke of disciples who traveled the road with him, the yoke of the women who came to the tomb on that Easter morning to tend to his body – he now offers his yoke. And if we stop relying on ourselves and accept his offer, our burdens and those of others – while not lighter – can be carried in a new way that offers renewed strength and renewed rest.

Amen.