

“My Yoke is Easy”

Matthew 11:25-30

Two week ago, we heard Christ say in our Gospel lesson, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Last week Christ said, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

And now today, we hear Christ say, “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me.”

First, two weeks ago, Christ tells us that we should not be in love with our life in this world. In fact, if someone should come and threaten to kill you, preserving your own life is not your number one priority. Your confession of faith, your family, and all those who are under your authority are to be of a higher concern than your own body – and in that order.

And last week, we heard Jesus warn us about falling into the trap that so many people do: misplacing love for the things of this temporary world over and above our love for the eternal living God. Loving the creation rather than the Creator who gave to us fathers and mothers; husbands and wives; sons and daughters – anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. As a father, those words are a reminder of the tremendous challenge of keeping my priorities straight.

And now Christ says to all of us who are weary and burdened with the trouble and evil of this world, “Come to Me, and I will give you rest.” Get away from yourselves, and come to Me. “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” But didn’t Jesus say in last week’s Gospel that “If you do not take up your cross and follow Me, you are not worthy of Me.”? How is a cross an easy yoke and a light burden?

As Martin Luther explains it in the excerpt from the bulletin today, “to come to Christ and go out from oneself is the great cross, which no one dreads more than he who is seeking to wash away his sins through his own works.”

The greatest cross for the sinful, selfish people that we are is to say and truly believe that the only thing that is truly important to me in this life is my relationship with God. To say that all the other things in this life are, as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “Meaningless, a chasing after the wind” is perhaps our greatest challenge.

Luther is right when he says that the greatest cross we bear is the

giving up of ourselves. Giving up all of the selfish desires that we have; putting God and His Church first; not just coming to hear His Word, but hearing His Word as being a priority in life, even on a beautiful summer morning, even if it were another holiday weekend.

We bear the cross by generously, and not begrudgingly, returning thanks to God for the generosity that He has shown toward us. And by focusing our attention on God's gift of forgiveness to us, and how the Holy Spirit can use us to further that Kingdom of Grace.

These are the "burdens" of the cross that Christ has laid upon us. The cross that the Christian carries is a burden if that person wishes to place there own selfish desires above the desires that God has for us. The burden of the cross is our fault.

Christ says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Come to Me. Leave your self behind. We are called to be like Lot and his family. Lot was instructed to flee the wicked city of Sodom and to not look back. Lot's wife looked back. She did not want to give everything up, and it led to her destruction.

Christ says, "Come to Me, and do not look back." Do not long for the things of this world. Like Sodom, this world will soon be destroyed. Christ says, "Come to Me...My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Gladly giving up the things of this world is a painful cross because of the selfish nature of all the children of Adam. Christ came promising something better – not just the promise of an eternity in heaven, but peace

and rest in a world which offers neither to you. This world is only temporary and we make the mistake of trying to cram in as much stuff as we can during our short time here.

The cross that Christ lays upon you is actually meant to ease your burden. The ultimate burdensome cross is the one Christ carried to Calvary. He carried the yoke of our sins upon Himself so that we would not have to.

The Lord said through the prophet Isaiah, "You have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." (43:24-25).

God loved us so much that He sent His Son into the world to be burdened with our sins and wearied with our offenses. So that now our yoke is easy and our burden is light.

Christ has eased our burden by taking the weight of sin off of our shoulders. But the cross that He gives to us does not allow us to live according to the world's standards. Looking out for ourselves first is no longer a part of a Christian's life. Doing God's will and taking care of others is the yoke that Christ has placed upon us.

It is meant to be an easy yoke and a light burden. How much heavier would our cross be had Christ not carried His cross to Calvary? Thanks be to God for lifting that burden off of our shoulders and placing it on Himself. Amen.