



Southwestern Minnesota Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Sermon by Synod Minister Heather Culuris *June, 2023*

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### Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

*Jesus chides people who find fault with both his ministry and that of John the Baptist. He thanks God that wisdom and intelligence are not needed to receive what God has to offer.*

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] <sup>16</sup>“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

<sup>17</sup>‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup>the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This morning we heard Jesus say: “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.”

Have you had times in your life when you have felt weary and exhausted? Burdened by worries or daily demands in your life? If so, you are not alone and Jesus words are meant for you.

Our own daily experiences and even scientific research tells us that many people in our communities are feeling tired and weary, overwhelmed and are carrying heavy burdens. Research by a recent sleep study shows that more than 35 percent of Americans get less than seven hours of sleep per night – and 1 in 20 has fallen asleep at the wheel in the past month.

Other research by the Society for Human Resource Management highlights the psychological toll that American employees carry. This study showed that 48 percent of U.S. workers feel mentally and physically exhausted at the end of their workday, while another 41 percent report feeling burned out from their work.

We ourselves may feel the personal reality of these words. We may struggle to sleep at night, our minds filled with to do lists or worries or people who weigh heavy on our hearts. We may wake up in the morning, still

feeling tired, wondering if we slept at all and reach for that cup or 4 of coffee to help us keep going. We may wonder how we are going to possibly get everything done, from work to caring for family to the daily demands in our lives. We may talk to a friend on the phone who tells us about the burdens they are carrying and we wish we could help more ourselves. We may know of a neighbor caring for a family member who is ill and we may wonder how we can lighten the load they carry every day.

Into this lived reality, we hear Jesus speak: “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.” These words from Jesus give us promise and comfort in the midst of our tiredness, in the midst of the burdens we carry. But to really understand it, we need to understand the image he is using of the yoke. Now a yoke, is an ancient, ancient farm implement use by working oxen in a field or pulling a wagon. Often it was used to keep two oxen pulling in the same direction,

equally distributing the weight and effort between the two working animals. It also was used as a teaching tool, when a young oxen was being trained, it was often yoked to a larger, stronger, already trained oxen. Then, the larger, stronger, more experienced oxen would carry more than its share of the weight and effort, while the younger oxen continued to learn. This ancient image would have immediately spoken to Jesus' listeners. For us, perhaps it takes a little reminder about what Jesus is really talking about. But imagine a team of oxen out in the fields of ancient Israel together. Or a team of oxen pulling a wagon of early pioneers across the Minnesota prairie even 150 years ago. The two oxen are yoked together, neither one doing the work alone, neither one carrying the burden alone, relying on each other and sharing the load with each other.

Indeed, Jesus' words promise us that we are yoked to him and that he helps us carry our burdens. When we are tired, when we don't know how we are going to put one foot in front of the other, when we feel like we can't do this on our own, we are yoked to Jesus, whose yoke is easy and whose

burden is light. When we are heavy of heart, when the worries we face weigh us down, when we wake up in the morning already exhausted before the day even starts, Jesus promises us that he is there with us, carrying us, leading us, sharing the load with us.

And, people of God, this is what we as the church also do for each other. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he writes: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Also in Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes: "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." When we pray for those in our community who are suffering, we are living out this promise and reality. When we serve a funeral meal for a family who is grieving, we live out the example of Jesus as Paul's letters describe. As we listen on the phone to a friend who needs a listening ear, we are carrying each other's burdens. As we bring soup to a neighbor who is going through chemo, we live as Jesus describes. When we get a text from a teenager who needs re-assurance and we respond with encouragement, we are carrying each other's burdens. In so many ways, in so many unique

moments, we walk together, yoked to each other and Christ, companions on the journey, carrying each other's burdens. This is who Jesus is for us and as God's people, it is who we are called to be for each other.

In this week ahead, take this reading home with you. Use it to center your prayer time. Put it on your kitchen table to read at mealtime. Let it percolate in your mind and heart. Then, when you get to a spot in your week when you are tired or carrying burdens, remember Jesus' promise and let it carry you forward. When you see another of God's children, who may be tired as well or carrying heavy burdens, remember Jesus' promise and our calling and carry their burden with them. Amen.