

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Psalm 45: 11-18

Romans 7:15-25a

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

The mental image of crawling up into God's lap has always been a soothing one for me. At the lowest moments of my life, it was a very human image of what I knew in my heart to be an undeniable and cosmic truth. God is a wonderful parent ... and whether I deserve it or not, God loves me. If my frail human parents could offer me comfort and support when I needed it most, then surely God could and would do likewise ... and even better. The comforting nature of God ... the invitation from Jesus to give me rest ... is irresistible. And I have rested there many times having no idea how to meet or manage what life had placed before me. And knowing full well that I had not done what God had asked me to do on any number of occasions.

For the last several weeks in our scripture readings, we've been hearing Jesus giving instructions and warnings to his disciples and preparing them for what life will be like without him and how he wants them to continue his mission. He wants them to go into all the world and tell everyone about him ... about all that they've seen and heard ... about all that Jesus has shown them about what the Kingdom of God looks like. He has authorized them to work wonders in his name and to continue to spread the coming of the kingdom to all the corners of the earth. And he has also told them that there will be a price to pay. It won't be easy, he warns. They will face rejection, failed relationships, loneliness, exclusion, persecution, and they may even lose their very lives. Discipleship is not easy. Being a Christian is hard.

So what is Jesus now trying to tell us as he makes his observations about his generation and how people are responding to the messengers of God? He starts by noticing that it doesn't matter how the messenger presents the message ... like a wedding dance or a funeral dirge ... the people are still going to dismiss it all. They don't seem to know what they want or to be satisfied with the variety that is offered to them.

But if you want to know how God feels about diversity, just take a look at the differences between John the Baptist and Jesus. John and Jesus couldn't have been more different ... and yet each of them bears an important message from God. John the Baptist was about as primitive as you could get. He didn't excel at the social graces ... he wasn't a party animal ... he was deadly serious about life and about all matters relating to God, but the people didn't listen

to him. As a matter of fact, he lost his head ...quite literally ... for telling the truth to powerful people who didn't want to hear it.

In many respects, Jesus was quite different. Jesus was sociable ... enjoyed a good party and good food and good drink ... his first miracle was to talk his Father into turning water into wine at a wedding feast. Jesus was all about enjoying life. He laughed. He loved. He made friends. He was so magnetic that droves of people followed him around. And yet, the enjoyment of life was not the focus of his life. He was not a hedonist, although he was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton and a friend to sinners. And he, too, lost his life for telling the truth to powerful people who didn't want to hear it. As different as John and Jesus were, neither of them seemed to have reached their own generation the way they wanted. They were as different as night and day, but both were soundly criticized and rejected by the powerful and the mighty. Sometimes, you just can't please some people!

However, even as Jesus makes these observations about his own generation ... that they are never satisfied and don't seem to know what they want ... He lifts up a prayer to God and thanks God for the fact that God has hidden his very nature from the wise and sophisticated and has revealed it to infants. More than once Jesus has said to us, "Unless you have faith as a little child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven" [Matt. 18:3]. There is something about childlike trust that allows those open to the possibilities of God's kingdom to approach it.

And here's the clue. Being aware of ... or close to ... or entering ... the kingdom of God is not about what we know or what we figure out or what we can prove. It's not about how well we manage to keep the law of God and the law of Moses. It's not about whether we can quote Scripture or if we can read Greek or Hebrew or if we are smart enough to write Biblical commentaries. It's not about any of those things. And it's not about whether or not we do all of it right ... all of the time. Actually, it's not about US and what we do at all!! It's about God and what God does. And it is the accepting and the trusting of God without understanding how it all works that is the key.

Jesus looks at his followers and has great compassion on them. Come to me, he says to them, all you who are weary trying to figure it all out. Come to me, all of you who are carrying the heavy burden of trying to keep all the laws all the time in all the right ways. That's an impossibility. By the time Jesus is preaching to his disciples in the first century, the Jewish establishment has created some 600 laws and traditions based on the Ten Commandments and the laws of the Torah in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Even if you knew all these laws ... and most people don't ... even devout Jews ... there is no way that any human being could

keep all of them all the time. Jesus knows this. And Jesus is offering relief. We can't do it by ourselves.

After having told his disciples how hard it is going to be for them to spread the Good News about the coming of God's Kingdom, Jesus is offering them relief from trying to do all of it right all the time. He invites them ... and us ... he beckons to them ... and to us ... to slip into his yoke which is different from the yoke of the Law of Moses. Jesus has criticized the religious leaders of his day multiple times about the heavy burden they have laid on the people trying to enforce the law. It's a burden they cannot possibly carry.

Jesus says his yoke is easy ... which may not be the best translation. It might be a better translation to say that Jesus' yoke fits well ... it is good ... it will not chaff ... it will make the burden lighter, not heavier. Jesus is inviting us to slip into his yoke with him. He's the stronger one. He's going to pull the load. We are not abandoned by him to try to figure out how to do all of this all by ourselves. He's offered to be our partner. Come to me, he says, the way a loving parent says to an exhausted child. Come to me, he calls, and I will give you rest. You can lay your burdens on me ... He reminds us that he is gentle and humble in heart. He will not grieve us more with our sins. He's not going to rub it in that we don't get it right all the time. He will unburden us. We will find rest for our souls ... our very weary and restless and exhausted souls.

We cannot save ourselves. Nothing we do will bring about our own salvation no matter how many laws we keep or how well we keep them. Our own salvation is a gift. It's not something we earn by being good or by figuring it all out or by being smart enough to know how everything works. Jesus' burden is light because he is carrying most of the load. Slip into the yoke with him. And get your nourishment and support from those in his body who are following the same path you follow. It is in the community of believers that we have the strongest tie to Jesus. For it is there that we are immersed in his body. Sometimes we are the taker; sometimes we are the giver; but we are never alone.

God's presence with us and God's love for us is not about what we do. It's all about what God does. Jesus has relieved us of the burden of having to get it right all the time. He has given us a gift that we could never earn and saved our lives in a way we never could. His love for us is never a matter of our actions. We don't need to prove anything. It is always a matter of His mighty love for us.

God's in charge. We are not.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.