

This School Is a Yoke

Matthew 11:20-30

Sunday, July 19, 2020—Aledo UMC

Pastor Dave Schultz

Gospel Lesson, Matthew 11:20-30

²⁸ “Come unto me, all you labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

If I were to write my résumé, one of the things it would reveal is a lot of schooling. I have a bachelor’s degree in Bible and Pastoral Care from North Central Bible College in Minneapolis; a master’s degree from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago and I am currently a Doctor of Ministry student at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary.

However, my most important educational experience will never appear on my résumé. I’ve taken tests at this school, but I’ve never received a final grade. The truth is I’ve never sat at a desk in this school; I never wrote a paper for this school; and my name has never appeared on the Dean’s List at this school. That’s because this school’s a yoke. In Matthew 11, Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”

Last Sunday night, I took my dog for a walk and on the way back, I happened to catch the words, “and learn from me” scrolling across the sign in front of our church; Mike Millar had already added Matthew 11:29 to the message board. I’d already preached two sermons from that passage; yet those words leapt out at me: **“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”** And I wondered, what should I be learning if I’m yoked to Christ? All week long I’ve been intrigued by that question. But where was I to find the answer?

The scriptures, of course. So I went back to Matthew 11 where Jesus goes on to say, “for I am gentle and humble in heart.” It seemed obvious to me that I could go on to preach a standard sermon about learning how to be gentle and humble in heart. In fact, it seemed so obvious that I don’t think I need to bother preaching that sermon to you. And you didn’t come here today (or log on to Facebook) to hear another “standard” sermon. Just practice being gentle and humble in heart. That’s all I need to say about that.

But the Spirit kept nudging me with that question: *What should I be learning if I’m yoked to Christ?* That’s when I backtracked a few verses to the words which preceded the invitation of Jesus in verse 28. And beginning in verse 20 we find Jesus’ indictment of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum:

²⁰ Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ²¹ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²² But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and

"This School's a Yoke!" Matthew 11:20-30, page 2

Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.²³ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.²⁴ But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

There's a word that's repeated three times in that passage and that word holds the key to Jesus' indictment of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. Did you catch the word? It's *miracles*. So what was the indictment? The people of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum *failed to recognize the miracles of God in their midst*.

That raises a question for us: What is a miracle? It's an important question because if we fail to recognize God's miracles, we may be indicted by Christ. Unfortunately, we expect miracles to be a big splash of some sort, like the parting of the Red Sea or raising Lazarus from the dead or even clear sign in the sky.

There was a young farm kid who liked to engage in nephelococcygia; that's the practice of seeing shapes in clouds. One day, the young farm kid looked up at the clouds and saw that the clouds perfectly formed the letters "P.C." He took it as a sign that God wanted him to "Preach Christ." So he left the farm, went to seminary, and learned how to preach Christ.

After graduation, he accepted a call to a little church in the middle of nowhere. Unfortunately, though, he was a terrible preacher. Everybody in the congregation knew it, but they were a kind bunch, so they put up with his horrific preaching.

One Sunday, the farm kid-turned preacher told the congregation the story of how he was called into the ministry when he saw the letters "P.C." in the clouds. After the service, one of the dear old ladies in the church asked him, "Did it ever occur to you that perhaps God was really telling you to "Plant Corn"?"

There's a subtlety to God's miracles; it goes along with being gentle and humble of heart. That means his miracles are often mistaken for mere coincidences. But the truth is that quite often God is in the coincidences; what we think are coincidences are really God-incidences.

What are the God-incidences in your life? That Bible verse you just happen to stumble when you needed it most; that chance meeting with a friend; that letter or that check that came at that critical hour: they're not just coincidences; they're God-incidences. And when you connect with Christ—when you go to Yoke School—you learn how to discern God's little miracles in your life.

Last week I quoted from John 5 verse 17, where Jesus states that "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." So if God is always working, then what is God doing? Certainly God is constantly at work preserving and sustaining Creation as well as healing and redeeming humanity, but those are the broad strokes. More specifically, God is at work through God-incidences to remind you of his constant presence in your life.

The weather was dreadful, but the businessman was on a mission: it was his wife's birthday and he had to pick up her gift. So as he pulled into the parking lot at the mall, he prayed, "God, it's raining cats and dogs and I don't want to get soaked; plus, I'm in a

"This School's a Yoke!" Matthew 11:20-30, page 3

hurry. So if you would open up a parking space for me close to the door of the mall, I promise I won't miss church for the next six months."

Just then a big black sedan pulled out of a prime parking space right by the main entrance to the mall. So the businessman prayed, "Never mind, God, I found one myself."

The businessman didn't recognize that God had just performed a little miracle for him—a God-incidence. Instead, he assumed that he was the answer to his own prayer.

That businessman, like the people of the Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, forgot that the Spirit of God is constantly on the move. The Spirit of God goes out ahead of us, in our neighborhoods; in our schools; in our places of business; and in our families, performing little acts of grace and mercy known as God-incidences. But once we enroll in Yoke School, as we learn from Christ, then we learn to recognize God's little miracles.

In April 2017, I went on my first Walk to Emmaus. I was a reluctant pilgrim; for several years I resisted going on the Walk. I never really thought it was for me. Finally, though, I gave in.

Just about the first thing you do on a Walk to Emmaus is you are asked to make friends with someone you've never met before. I looked across the room and I spotted a man wearing a Chicago Cubs 2016 World Champions sweatshirt and I thought, "I want to be friends with that man." So I asked him his name and he said his name was Todd. I asked him what he did for a living and he said he was a hospice chaplain. I said, "I was a hospice chaplain for five years!" He said, "That's not all that I do; I'm also a pastor." I said I was a pastor, too. I asked him where he was serving and he said he was the pastor of the Cambridge Baptist Church. And I said, "I used to be the pastor of Cambridge Baptist Church!"

Of all the walks I could've gone on, and of all the friends I could've made! I knew it was more than a coincidence; it was a God-incidence to help me know that I was right where God wanted me to be. It was a little miracle God had arranged just for me. But that's the kind of thing that happens when you go to Yoke School. And the tests come in learning to recognize God's little miracles in your life and the constant moving of the Spirit.

I hope you've enrolled in Yoke School. I hope the Spirit is helping you to discern the subtle God-incidences of your life. I hope you're learning to recognize that the Spirit of God is constantly at work in our church, in your neighborhood, in your school, in your workplace, in your family and in your life.

Thanks be to God.