

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

Psalm 45: 11-18

Romans 7:15-25a

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

We are living in turbulent times. The cultural sands are shifting beneath our feet. There is the feeling of fatigue and uneasiness in the air. Practically everyone I speak with complains of feeling exhausted...all the time...almost as though such feelings were unexpected. Within the last six months our lives have been put in jeopardy...quite literally. We are being assaulted by an invisible enemy with unknown weapons that can kill any one of us at any moment. We aren't quite sure how to protect ourselves and being on high alert about our physical well-being is exhausting.

We are social creatures...each of us with a web of connections with others...family and friends and neighbors...that we find we cannot access in the customary ways. We can't be physically close to one another. We can't hug or even shake hands. We have to stand six feet apart and we need to wear masks. This is not how human beings relate to one another. Trying to figure out how to meet our needs for connection with others is exhausting...and even under the best of circumstances our solutions are not quite satisfying. ZOOM just doesn't quite do it.

We wonder how this invisible enemy is going to affect our economy...collectively and individually. Will the economy grind to a halt? Will all our savings disappear? Will our jobs disappear? Will we have enough to pay our bills and buy our food? Will there be enough food? Just thinking about these possibilities is exhausting. Concern about how we will meet our own needs and the needs of those we love is exhausting.

Recent events have brought into sharp focus our pressing need to continue...or perhaps even to begin...the reconciliation between races in our country. We've been through this before and yet it hasn't all been quite settled yet. There is obviously still more to be done. We need to learn. We need to listen. We need to make changes. The cultural sands are shifting and trying to get some secure footing is exhausting.

In a few more months we will have a national election. We will choose our national leaders who will steer our country through domestic and international troubled waters. We feel weighed down and burdened by the need to make decisions of such importance. Trying to figure out the best course of action to take is exhausting.

We are flooded with conflicting emotions about all of these things...confusion, anger, sadness, despair, curiosity, resistance, hope, uneasiness, anxiety, frustration, and bewilderment...just to

name a few. We bring all of this with us to our worship service this morning. We are gathered to pause and to worship God and to hear the words and the message of Jesus Christ in the gospel. And this morning's message speaks to us exactly where we are in this moment. Jesus says to us, "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." How did those who planned the lectionary readings for us know how badly we would need to hear these words at just this moment in our lives?

As we step into the Gospel reading this morning, we find that Jesus has already begun his ministry and has chosen his twelve disciples. He has been instructing his disciples and he has been healing people in the countryside. He has explained to his disciples that he has come to bring a sword, not peace. Standing with him will cause dissension for the disciples in their families and in their circle of friends. Taking a stand almost always causes dissention of some kind. But in this passage that follows that warning, Jesus reassures them and us that being partnered with Jesus will make the burden bearable.

But how do we know when we are partnered with Jesus? There are lots of ways to interpret what Jesus said and what he asked us to do. There are many people who claim the Christian life who have very different ideas of what that means. So what are we to think? And what are we to choose?

There are many ways in which God works through people. As our scripture lesson begins this morning, we are confronted with the great disparity between the prophet John the Baptist and the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Surely all of us will agree that God was working through both of them, but they couldn't have been more different. So who are we to believe is the agent of God? We are told that both of them were doing as God had directed them to do. John was austere and critical and called upon the children of Israel to repent of their sins. He lived in the desert and ate locusts and wild honey and was dressed in animal skins. He was so different from Jesus that he even sent one of his disciples to Jesus to ask if Jesus was the one John had been expecting or should John wait for another? Jesus was not a loner out in the wilderness. He was not austere. Jesus was very sociable. He liked being around people and he loved a good party...like the one at the wedding in Cana...and he enjoyed a good meal even with pharisees and tax collectors. He wasn't choosy about the company he kept. And he wasn't above breaking some of the Jewish laws when human need was at stake...like healing on the Sabbath or allowing his followers to pick grain on the Sabbath so they could eat. While John was critical, Jesus was all-embracing. So who was sent from God?

We know that they both were. So what does that tell us about the nature of God? The diversity we see before us is the reflection...the replication even...of the diversity of God. Step back and

think for a minute what that means for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when we encounter people with different points of view and different understandings of Jesus and of God even though we are learning about them from the same Scripture and we are inviting them in to experience the same circumstances that we face. John the Baptist was not the Son of God as Jesus was, but he was the servant of God and while he was doing things very differently than the way Jesus did them, he still spoke God's truth...just in a different way. So, which one of them was wrong? If our understanding of God is different from someone else's, which one of us is wrong? That's a question for each of us to take seriously and contemplate. Maybe they are wrong. Or maybe we are wrong. Or maybe God's truth embraces both.

Jesus tells us to bring our burdens to him. He tells us to yoke ourselves with him. He will carry the burden with us...not for us, but with us. We spend so much of our lives...from childhood on...proving to ourselves and to everyone else that we are capable and competent people. We can do it by ourselves. If you have any doubt about that drive to master tasks, just watch a 2 or 3 year old dress themselves. They will almost always rebuff any attempt from someone else to help them. They want to feel competent. They want to feel capable. Even at that tender age they want to feel like they are in control of events in their own lives and they want to know that they have the skills to take care of themselves. Lots of us never outgrow that desire for competence and control and independence. Being capable and competent is not a bad thing. Those are actually admirable traits in anyone. We all admire people who seem to have a handle on everything...all the time! But most of us need help most of the time. Most of us need the comfort of being yoked with someone who has more expertise, more competence, more intellect, more capability than we have. And that's exactly what Jesus is offering to us. "Take up my yoke" he says, "for it is easy and my burden is light." When we are yoking ourselves with Jesus we know that he's got it covered...whatever it is. We know that he's going to steer us in the direction of doing work that is fulfilling to us, even if it is sometimes hard. And we know the comfort of knowing that Jesus is right here with us pulling most of the load. He told us that his burden is easy and it is light...because we are in there with him and he is in there with us.

Have you ever noticed that when you are engrossed in work that is stimulating and gratifying to you and rewarding in some inexplicable way that your fatigue level is very low? When the burden is rewarding it doesn't feel so much like a burden. It's not exhausting. It's satisfying. It feels good. Even if the work we are doing because Jesus asked us to do it may not be the work we would have chosen for ourselves, it is still manageable and sometimes even rejuvenating because Jesus is working right there with us.

In the midst of our current state of exhaustion, look for the yoke of Jesus. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. So much of what is exhausting us now are things over which we have no control. And like that little 2 year old trying to master tying his own shoes, we don't want any help. But this is not the time to be stubborn about accepting help and partnership from Jesus.

All these things that are exhausting us...worry about things over which we have no control, a sense of disconnection from others because of physical distance, trying to figure out new ways of doing things, wondering what will happen in the future, fears about things we can neither see nor control and frustration about not being able to solve any of it. Jesus offers us a wonderful invitation. "Take my yoke" he says, "for my burden is light." Partner with Jesus. Yoke up with Jesus and let Jesus pull the load and solve the problems we can not solve on our own. He has proven with his life that he loves us and he will care for us and walk with us if we allow him to.

We are not in this alone.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN