

6th Sunday after Pentecost
July 19, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
A Yoke for You

Dear Friends in Christ,

Are you tired? Tired of hearing about that word that begins with a C and ends with OVID? Are you tired from work? Tired from raising children? Tired from battling illness and disease? Tired from conflict and trouble in your family? Tired of being tired? We can all use some rest in our lives. We need rest for our bodies, like a good night's sleep, an afternoon nap, a relaxing vacation, or some time with a good book. We might need some rest for our minds by turning off the news on television, closing the laptop, putting down the phone, tablet or newspaper. Rest for our bodies and minds is good for us.

Jesus promises us rest for our souls. This rest is even better than a good nap or a clear mind. But the way in which we receive this rest seems strange. Jesus tells us to take upon ourselves a tool used for hard work. A yoke is a piece of wood shaped to fit over the neck and shoulders in order to carry or pull heavy objects. Oxen and cattle are connected with a yoke in order for them to pull a heavy load together. A human might use a yoke over their neck in order to carry two large buckets of water at one time. A yoke is a tool for hard work. Yet Jesus tells us that there is a yoke for you that will give you rest. Real rest is only found in Jesus. His yoke is easy to bear.

Matthew 11:25–30 (NIV84)

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Real Rest is Only Found in Jesus

There are many ways to get rest for your body and mind. Some walk, run, bike or do some sort of physical exercise to give their body rest from sitting in an office chair all day. Others rest in a recliner with their feet up after a physically demanding job on their feet all day. Some find rest at a campsite in the woods. Others rest by joining friends on a video game. As far as ways to give your mind and body rest, there are many options and different people will find different ways that work for them.

But what about when you are weary from dealing with the consequences of sin in your life? What about when you are burdened by guilt and shame because of your own sinful actions? How many ways are there for you to receive spiritual rest for your soul?

Again, the world gives us many options. Some will try to distract themselves from their guilt by pouring themselves into work or play. Being busy day and night gives no time for guilt...except in those times between the business when you wonder what God truly thinks of you and frantically search for something else to do to stop your conscience from speaking. Some who are weary and burdened look for spiritual rest in drinking so much alcohol that one can't think straight or abusing prescription pain medicines or using illegal drugs. Some will look for relief from being weary and burdened by accumulating material things in life. If you have enough stuff, you shouldn't have to worry about anything, right? Others look to spiritual practices of meditation and looking within yourself to find rest, but all we can truly find within ourselves is sin and weakness. The Jewish

religious leaders taught the people to obey God's and their commands to find rest but all the people felt was weariness and the burden of guilt.

There is no way to spiritual rest, to forgiveness of sin and removal of guilt except through Jesus Christ. Even with all the learning and wisdom of the world, we could not receive this rest. But children know and receive this rest. God has revealed to children what the most intelligent of our world cannot believe. What is this simple message that the wise do not often understand? God forgives me because Jesus died for me. I am not guilty because Jesus took my sins away. I don't have to worry about my future because Jesus died and rose so I can be with him in heaven. This simple message of forgiveness through Jesus gives rest for our souls. Yes, our bodies and mind may be tired, but everything is good between God and the one who trusts in Jesus.

Thanks be to the Lord that he brought you to a child like faith. Young children trust their parents in all things. Moms have the power to heal and make the pain go away from a fall in the dirt with a hug and a kiss. Dads have super strength as they toss their child in the air for fun. With mom and dad taking care of things, there is nothing to worry about. With our Father in heaven taking care of things and Jesus forgiving our sins and the Spirit keeping us in a childlike faith, our burden of sin and guilt are nothing to worry about. Christ has carried that burden for us.

And he promises:

His Yoke is Easy

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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

In chapter 10 of Matthew, Jesus has been warning his disciples about the many troubles they will face as they proclaim the good news that the Savior has arrived. They will face persecution, hatred, arrest and death because they told people that Jesus is the Messiah. Christ told them and us in the gospel lesson last Sunday that we are to take up our cross and follow him. It will be difficult. But here at the end of chapter 11, Jesus tells his disciples that the yoke he gives them is easy.

Yokes are never easy. When a yoke is put upon two animals, those two animals are in for a hard day of plowing or pulling heavy loads. When a human puts a yoke over his neck, he is doing it in order to carry more, not less. The picture of a yoke is also used in the Bible for slavery and oppression. Israel was under the yoke of the Egyptians as they were slaves and forced to work for Pharaoh. Paul uses the imagery of a yoke in connection to sin. We were once under the yoke of sin, but we are now freed from that yoke by Christ. In almost every case, a yoke is something undesirable in the Bible.

However, Jesus tells us to take his yoke upon ourselves because it is easy and the burden will be light. It is a striking picture for those who only saw a yoke as something that would be a heavy burden. How can following Jesus be easy?

It is easy because Jesus is not like a cruel and vindictive Pharaoh who increased the burden on the people of Israel. Jesus is not like a farmer who uses the yoke to get work out of his animals that he himself could not do. Christ is gentle and humble in heart. Christ invites us to take his yoke for our benefit, not for his. He is not trying to get some work out of us so he can sit back and be lazy. He humbled himself to do all the heavy lifting for us. He carried the cross upon which was the burden of all the sin of the world. That burden has been lifted from our shoulders. He humbled himself to experience the wrath of God in the place of all people. We do not

need to carry that burden and fear of standing before the angry Judge on the Last Day. Christ has removed our sin and guilt.

Evil kings and lords of this world use the yoke to oppress and get labor from the weak. Good kings and lords in this world may not oppress but still use their power to get work done by others. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, does not place a yoke upon us for his benefit, but for ours. He wants to give us rest for our souls, to remove the burden of sin and guilt and give us certain hope for eternal life.

Very few human rulers would place themselves in a yoke to do work along with their subjects. But Christ did and still does. Think of it like this. If I was connected by a yoke to a Clydesdale in order to pull a heavy wagon, who is going to do the most work? I would just need to walk along as that giant horse did all the work. My yoke would be easy and my burden light.

You are under a yoke but Christ is there with you. The two of you are pulling and laboring through this life and every trouble that comes. But your yoke is easy and your burden is light because Christ has and will carry the load for you. When are connection to Christ, that yoke, is weak or forgotten, our burden becomes heavy. For we think we have to carry all guilt and trouble and sin by ourselves. It is important for us to stay connected to Christ through his Word and Sacrament. The means of grace keep us yoked to Christ so that we are assured the Christ is doing all things necessary for our eternal good.

Amen.