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The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.36 No.21

The Fourth Sunday after Easter

04/24/05

THE YOKE: PART II

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29). There are no words of Jesus more tender and comforting than these. The yoke is his. As we take it upon ourselves, we receive the revelation of God himself and the freedom of his love shown to us in Christ.

The taking is learning. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me" says Jesus. The verbal form of the word "learn" is what is called a present imperative. It means that Jesus is giving an instruction to be followed continually. Learning of him is not something that happens once and is finished. It is not only the moment of baptism, or of profound repentance and conversion. It only begins there.

To learn of the Lord Jesus is to enter into his life. It is his being, life, wisdom, power, and goodness, in all its fullness, that he himself has received from the Father, and makes known to us in a way that we can believe and learn. Our learning continues and grows and never ends, because we grow into the infinite life of God. That is why we pray for the faithful departed, that God may grant them "continual growth" in his "love and service" (1928 Book of Common Prayer, p.75). We yearn together as the Body of Christ both here and in eternity to increase in the infinite life of God. That is what we were made for. St. Augustine called man the *capax dei*, the capacity for God. To learn of Jesus is to transform the potential capacity of man into actual participation in God.

And so learning is much more than mere knowledge. When St. John says that the knowledge of God is eternal life he is telling us that this kind of learning is a living reality. It is like the difference between knowing about swimming and actually feeling the water swirling past you. It is like the difference between standing at a window and looking out and observing the spring breeze caressing the dogwoods and azaleas, and then going outdoors and all at once having the cool wind and warm sunshine against your face. To learn of Jesus is to partake of his life, of all that he is.

The wonder of Jesus sharing his life is found in his humility. "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart." The yoke is not the yoke of bondage; it is the yoke of freedom. Jesus is meek and the meek inherit the earth. They do not live by the

presumption of human pride and the illusion of self-sufficiency. They are poor in spirit; they know their need of God and dependence upon him. They mourn for the brokenness of the world, and look to God for his comfort. And so the meek are truly ready to inherit all that God has to give. That is what Jesus essentially is, the one who receives all that God has to give.

And so as we look at the Savior who offers us his yoke we realize that Jesus has no interest in worldly power, in a lordship of domination where the souls of men become extensions of vanity and egotism. He comes meekly, with a heart open to God, ready to forgive and to heal and to love - infinitely. It is his infinite life that we enter as we take his yoke.

"...and ye shall find rest unto your souls." The contrast here is between those who labor in spirit and are heavy laden with the burdens of the world and those who receive the rest that Jesus confers in his yoke. It is a decisive and definitive contrast.

"Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labor, until the evening" says the Psalmist (104:23). Labor was originally a thing given to man in the integrity of his being. Adam was to dress the garden and to keep it. Man was given the place of naming the animals, and exercising a sweet dominion over them. But with the fall of man into sin, this labor has become difficult, not just the doing of it, but the purpose for it. Man has himself fallen into purposes which do not sustain his spirit. His loves flow into the world away from God, and his spirit is left unsatisfied, wanting and needing, not just a proper relation to this earth, but a taking hold of heaven where the human spirit finds true happiness.

To put this another way, perhaps a little more simple. We must return to being meek if we are to be happy. Meekness, as so many have said, is not weakness, but really great strength, inasmuch as true humility is always open to God. When one desires the Spirit of God to fill him, then he finds his loves and his purposes being transformed. And to find one's loves and purposes transformed is to rest.

This, then, is the great reward of the yoke of Jesus. Rest. "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee" says Augustine.

It seems a blatant contradiction that we might take a yoke upon us, an image of burden and constant effort, and that in reality this taking is not burdensome but easy and light and restful. The yoke of Jesus could not be so, if it were not the absolute power to make you and me happy, and so to save us. But this is the reality of the yoke. Under it, the human spirit finds peace and contentment. With it, the human spirit is able to see where and to move toward where we truly want to be. By it, we become partakers of the divine knowledge and love, of the knowing relation of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father, and of the sweet and fathomless love with which their knowledge is made utterly whole.

I suppose that in the end what the yoke of Jesus Christ is all about is himself. To take his yoke is to take him, and to live by, and with, and in him. In his yoke we share in all that he is, a union of God and Man, of divine and human, truly made one, without destroying the integrity

of either. It is a great mystery that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man, but he is. And the life that he gives to us in his yoke is the freedom of his life as God given fully to man. His yoke is this very mystery given now to us. May we take it with joy and find the rest of our souls in him.

The Rev'd. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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