

# Come to Me...I will give you rest

## July 5, 2020

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church      Rev. David Labuhn**

Again, today in our Gospel reading, Jesus uses a common, everyday illustration to provide a Gospel truth. The item is a yoke, a wooden bar or frame with smaller bars or rope loops that fit over the necks of two oxen or other draft animals. A single wooden shaft was attached to the yoke and extended back to the plow or cart.

Although in this country, it is rare to see animals with a yoke, yokes are still used in many places throughout the world as horses, oxen, and water buffalo are used to work the land. Draft animals, the name given to pulling animals, must be harnessed, or yoked together to pull effectively. So, the yoke embraces two parties to unite them and hold them in a position to perform labor. To be yoked is to be joined or linked together to work productively in harmony.

Since carpenters constructed the various sizes and styles of yokes, it is likely that Jesus was intimately familiar with their design, and perhaps, had even fashioned many himself in Joseph's shop. For strong, large animals, the yoke is not heavy, nor is it uncomfortable. It is one of the smaller and lighter pieces of equipment involved in doing their work, but it is vitally important. The yoke allows the animals to combine their strengths and accomplish much more than either one could do alone—and to do what would be impossible for a man by himself.

Now, one of three things can happen when a team of draft animals is hitched with a yoke to a load.

1. The load may be too heavy for the team to pull at all.
2. The load may be manageable, but the team may not pull together in unison, and so the team struggles unsuccessfully against the load.
3. Or, the yoked team, the united team, successfully pulls even a very heavy load easily.

How do we see these three possibilities in the words of Jesus from our Gospel reading today, ***“Take my yoke upon you . . . for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”***

**What about when the load is too heavy?**

**The Law of God is immovable.** It is like an unmovable burden and, Christianity has a lot of Law in our faith – there are a lot of rules in the Law. We have whole books of the Bible full of instructions on how to live and how not to live as we love God and our neighbor. Because we know these rules, we live with the knowledge that we need to live up to them. We know these are the expectations that God has for His people.

**But the truth is, we all know we can’t and don’t live up to all these rules as God intended not even a single one of them.** We are burdened with the Law and we are burdened with our sinful natures. The apostle Paul, speaks for all of us when he admitted he couldn’t obey the Law either. He wrote, in Romans 7, ***“I don’t understand my own actions. I don’t do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”***

Now if I do what I don't want, I agree with the law, that it is good. I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. I don't do the good I want, but the evil I don't want is what I keep on doing. I do what I don't want, and it is no longer I who does it, but sin that dwells within me. Wretched man that I am! Often people give up realizing this point.

Getting back to our draft animals. They're not as dumb as some people think. If the load is too heavy, the animals will stop pulling. They also are not very likely to try hard the next time they are hooked to a heavy load. They become discouraged and lose their will to pull. Sounds just like what St. Paul says in Romans.

It's the same way, with people who try to pull the weight of the Law, to fulfill all God's commandments - all 10. It becomes a burden, the burden and the guilt of the failure of trying to pull the burden of the Law by ourselves up to God's standard, causes us to become discouraged and lose the will to pull. God's Law seems like an immovable object— inflexible, unyielding, crushing in its demands. Total despair is the natural result of trying to pull all the weight of the Law. It is impossible for us to pull it successfully.

**Synergism:** Many within the Christian church today say in subtle ways that we humans can pull this load ourselves; all we need to do is cooperate with Jesus, then, we ourselves can pull the weight of the Law together without him, each of us doing our own part, "*pulling our own weight,*" as the saying goes. Nothing could be further from

the truth. This is our (foolish) human wisdom, AND we may think that is the point of the yoke image. Such thinking is called synergism and this thinking is folly and sinful. Scripture does not allow this interpretation either. AND, we must interpret Scripture in a manner that is consistent with all of God's revelation.

In the days of the apostles, as the early Christian church spread from Jewish believers to the Gentiles, some insisted that the Gentile Christians should ***"be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses."*** (Acts 15:5) But St. Peter rebuked them, asking, ***"Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?"*** (Acts 15:10) Jesus himself angrily said, ***"You experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with heavy burdens they can hardly carry."*** (Lk 11:46)

**But thanks be to God**, Christ bears what is too heavy for us: Our God acts for us. According to God's good pleasure (v 26), he reveals to us the mystery of his kingdom. And, through faith, we receive the blessings of Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection. Jesus alone with no help from any other human being, fulfilled the Law even though he was abandoned by his disciples and even forsaken by his Father. Jesus bore the load of sin for the whole world while yoked to the cross. Only Christ, fully God, could pull this load, and only He, fully man, could bear it on our behalf. He carried that entire awful weight, and that means that none of us has the yoke of the Law resting as a burden on our shoulders.

So, the victory has been won. The outcome of the contest has been decided. The devil and his teams have been completely defeated. All who are weary and burdened find rest in Jesus Christ through the faith that trusts in His grace.

**Bearing our crosses:** We, the redeemed in Christ live in the knowledge and confidence of victory in heaven, but as disciples, we continue to labor in the meantime until that day. Saints and sinners at the same time.

You need to know, the burdens we bear are not jobs we must perform in order to be saved, but joyful work in Christ's service because we have been saved. These burdens and this Law fall into the area of discipleship. Like the disciples whom Christ sent out to proclaim the good news (Matthew 10), we are yoked to Christ so that with him we can accomplish in God's kingdom what would be impossible for us to do alone.

**Teamwork in sanctification:** Every athletic team knows that it is stronger than any individual on the team BUT ONLY if they pull in the same direction.

**The teamster:** It seems obvious that two animals are stronger than one. However, one good horse can actually pull more than two horses that are not working together. The teamster is the person driving the team. He or she is responsible for the teamwork. Teamsters depend primarily on voice commands. Draft animals must rely on and trust in the commands of the teamster in order to function as a team. It is the same with us disciples of Christ. Straining forward alone without the command of God will not profit

much. Jesus said, ***“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”*** It is impossible to know the will of God apart from the Word of God, spoken to us by God’s Son. In the Word of Christ, we know the will of his Father and can find rest and reward in following his commands.

**Team direction:** For us, who are yoked to Christ, the Law of God serves to guide us in holy living. Once the awesome weight of the curse of the Law has been removed, it is no longer too heavy.

Following the Law of God as a disciple can be a strain, but only because our sinful nature still tries to distract us and point us in the wrong direction. We have to pull with Jesus, according to the direction of his command. But pulling with Jesus seems hard sometimes until we listen to this promise: ***“God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*** (1 Cor 10:13)

**His yoke is easy, his burden light. An easy yoke:** To a powerful Clydesdale horse, the yoke itself is light as a feather. Strong animals may not even notice the yoke except as it keeps the two individuals working as a team so that the burden they pull seem light. It is rare to find two draft animals with the same strength. One is usually quite a bit stronger than the other, even if they are approximately the same size. So, a piece of equipment called an evener works along with the yoke to balance the load. The evener

can be adjusted so that the stronger animal bears the heaviest portion of the load.

**A burden that lifts:** Being yoked to Christ means that when this life becomes weighted down AND right now it seems very heavy with all that is happening around us when added to all the usual heavy burdens we face individually, or when over a long period of time the regular burdens of life become overwhelming, our Lord pulls much more than half. In fact, we may have no idea just how much of our load he is carrying. We would only know how utterly dependent we are on his strength if He were to drop it all on us—which he promises never to do.

Luther in commenting on this text said, *“Christ’s burden does not oppress but makes light, and itself bears rather than is borne.”*

**Conclusion:** What does all this mean for us today? It means that because Christ has borne the weight of the Law and has removed the curse of sin from our shoulders we don’t need to work for our salvation. We find rest in him and his gift of salvation, which is not heavy but instead lifts us. It means we don’t need to despair in our struggle with all the burdens in this temporal life. Because we are yoked to Christ. And with Him, we pull only that share of the burden which he has given us ample strength to bear. And, by his grace, we are able to bear it. It means that he will never ask us to pull more than he has empowered us to handle. It means that when the going gets tough, Christ will carry on for us because his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. It

means despite all the burdens in this life with Christ beside us, we have a peace that passes all understanding.

So now, may these words from my mouth and the meditation of our hearts on these words of Christ grant you peace this day and all your days until you come into the presence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for all eternity.

Amen.