

Sunday Lesson – July 5, 2020

GOSPEL: Matthew 11: 16-19; 25-30

About Matthew



Audience. When reading the book of Matthew it becomes clear that the writer was speaking to a Jewish audience. One of the obvious reasons is that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is mentioned over 30 times and never the Kingdom of God. This is because the Jews do not speak the name of God and this could be the very reason that Matthew used this phrase. There are many times while reading the book that an event happens and a prophecy is cited. The event is mentioned as the direct fulfillment of a promise made to the Jews by one of their Jewish prophets, and the fulfillment of the prophecy was happening before their very eyes. (Excerpts from <https://www.bible-history.com/new-testament/bookofmatthew.html>)

Summary

Jesus rebukes those who refuse to be pleased by either John the Baptist's or Jesus' ministry; Jesus praises those who do receive His message; Jesus' invitation. (Excerpts from https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_Mat/Mat_11.cfm)

Gospel Reading

16-19: "How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, 'We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.' John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riffraff. Opinion polls don't count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating... **25-30:** Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: "Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You've concealed your ways from sophisticates and

know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that's the way you like to work."

Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. "The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I'm not keeping it to myself; I'm ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." *The Message (MSG)*

What It Could Mean?

It's actually something of a two-step waltz. The first step is to decide what you think God should be (and that is usually something that affirms what we already think, feel, believe and/or have done). The second is to judge all others – and that includes their beliefs about God – by this same notion.

I think that's pretty much what's going on in this scene from Matthew. John the Baptist comes along, and he doesn't measure up. He doesn't conform, that is, to what the folks present think he should be like. He's too reclusive, too ascetic, a loner, too somber and serious. He should eat and drink more. Then Jesus comes and he's, well, too much the opposite. He drinks and eats too much, and with the wrong kind of people to boot.

Maybe we should call it the Goldilocks syndrome: never being quite satisfied. John (and the God John represents) is just toooooo severe, while Jesus (and the God he represents) is just toooooo accepting. We'd like our religious leader to be juuuust

right, which pretty much means juuuust like us. But here's the thing: if God were just like us, who would save us?

Which is perhaps what's so appealing about our pictures of God. They don't threaten us, don't expect change from us, don't ask us to do all that much, and don't do much more than affirm us. And affirmation is great, even necessary at times. But it doesn't save. And so God comes along – first in John, then even more fully in Jesus – in part to disrupt our pictures of God, to shake our hands loose from holding those pictures (which all too often can harden into idols) too tightly.

Jesus does another thing in this passage as well, though. He doesn't simply call our pictures and expectations into question, but also gives us another picture. God is the one who bears our burdens. God is the one who shows up in our need. God is the one who comes along side of us. Nothing demonstrates this more than the cross – God's willingness to embrace all of our life, even to the point of death, in Jesus, to demonstrate God's profound love and commitment, love and commitment that will not be deterred...by anything.

What this passage is not about is self-care, but discipleship. Jesus isn't saying, that is, "take care of yourself; if you don't, who will?" But rather, "as you embark on the discipleship way, I am with you." Self-care matters, of course, but it's so very easy to confuse the good news with good advice, and while good advice can be helpful, it also doesn't save. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once put it this way to students of his at the underground seminary in Finkenwalde: "God's intention is to bear or sustain us, not to teach or improve us" (DBWE 14:511).

Perhaps what our people need – and what we need – is not so much another command – *Rest more! Take care of yourself!* – but rather the reminder that God always shows up where we least expect God to be: in the need of our neighbor, in the person that doesn't look anything like you, in the person who believes and thinks and acts differently than we do and, just as

importantly, than we think they should. And that in all these circumstances, our call is the same: to care for them, to meet them where they are, to accept them as we are able.

It's not easy work. But as we undertake this kind of discipleship – which pretty much has been the subject of the last few weeks of our readings from Matthew – we discover God in Jesus is already there. Waiting for us, encouraging us, forgiving us, bearing us. Which is what makes the burden light, the yoke not just easy but joyful..." (Excerpts from <https://www.davidlose.net/2017/07/pentecost-5-a-where-we-least-expect-god-to-be/> by David Lose)

Readings for Further Study

- **Romans 7: 15-25**

"Jesus Christ...acted to set things right in this world of contradictions"

- **Luke 15:2**

"He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends."

- **John 7:37**

"if anyone thirsts, let them come to me and drink."

Thought for the Day

"The two chief things are faith and love. Faith receives the good; love gives the good. Faith offers us God as our own; love gives us to our neighbor as his own." – Martin Luther

A Prayer

In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray, Dear Lord, see me through these hard times. In these troubling times, I am filled with unspeakable fears. I reach out my hand to you now, And ask you to walk besides me. I cannot carry all my burdens, But I know you can, and will. Please walk beside me. Please guide me. Please help me hold on strong, Through the trials and storms. Help me hold on to my faith, In even the darkest hour. Stay with me Lord, And show me Your way. In your love and Holy Spirit I abide. **Amen.** (Unknown)