

Pentecost 4
July 6, 2014
Peace Lutheran Church
Pastor David G Mullen
Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

To what shall I compare this generation? Our youngest son, his wife being out of town, devoted the entire weekend to a round of fun things with our seven year old grandson, who is a good kid, but of course, totally human. Consider this. Father took son over to swim at a buddy's home. Later, father and son went to an arcade to play games. Next day, they went out for lunch and then joined friend to at the latest Transformer movie. And the day after that, father and son went down to Six Flags in Vallejo going on one ride after another and busying themselves with other entertainment. They stayed until the park closed at 8 o'clock. Then out on the freeway, and facing an hour and a half drive home, exhausted father heard seven year old son saying from the backseat, Daddy, daddy, daddy, when we get home, can you play with me? You haven't played with me all day!"

What!? Ok, he's just a seven year old, but his momentary blindness to the whole weekend gift his loving father had lavished on him, is a manifestation of the archetypal human situation the scriptural narratives point to over and over again. Jesus was commenting on this sort of blindness when he compared his people to complaining children in the market place. His people, like my grandson having just experience a whole wonderful weekend with his dad. Jesus' disappointment and frustration is that the people, who were witnesses to all that he was doing among them—healings, teaching, and demonstrating boundless compassion for the marginalized and the poor – a lot of his people, especially their leaders, saw only trouble instead of grace. It was like they couldn't or wouldn't see the lavish goodness and mercy of God. They narrowed their theology and consequently their judgment to a narrow vision of what God must be like, and thus rejecting those God sent them to lead them into the future. *John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*

“To what shall I compare this generation?” Good question, Jesus! The human problem, seen every in the world is that human beings act like petulant children, missing out on the signs of God's love in the world. We want the God of our imaginations to play our game, to do things our way, on our terms. And in a moment of crushing disappointment, we may feel like picking up our religion marbles and going home to mommy. Forget God. Forget Jesus. I am not going to

go to church anymore mutters the adult. But underneath that adult bravado, I believe, is loss and sorrow—and a fear that just around the corner will be a struggle that'll require us to consciously bear the inevitable burdens of existence.

I worry that perhaps, with all my talk about facing reality here at Peace Lutheran, about making mission evangelism the top priority, you have been feeling weary and heavy burdened. And maybe, in your hearts, there is a feeling of betrayal. Having been long time Christians, and faithful church members, how can it be that Lutherans are now facing the need to reinvent ourselves, not just here but everywhere, in all our churches?! Can't we just keep playing it the way we always have? Well, no!

Guys like John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, Luther, and countless other lesser luminaries, down to even me as an annoying interim pastor, keep bringing all this disturbing stuff about mission, purpose, and alignment with God. No one is inventing this stuff, by the way; the truth is out there, and the reality of missing the mark and the meaning applies to us. And now these days it is being brought into consciousness by the Holy Spirit. Nationally. Globally. Locally. And that is a good thing. And if we can come to accept the truth and deal with reality, while seeing such struggle as the work of God among us, we are blessed.

In fact, we children of God are being asked to take an adult kind of risk and discover again the challenging presence and all of God. Jesus, knowing well what is at stake, makes this offer and this promise: "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." Jesus is offering us a different sort of experience, not one that feeds our need to run things our way but something that brings us into the realm of God and God's activity in the world. There is work to be done. And yes there is the yoke.

Yokes, commonly used with beasts of burden, like oxen, to pull great loads, were big beams of wood harnessed to beasts of burden which were then hooked to wagons or plows. And for efficiency, they were often double. That meant that two animals shared the work load.

Back to grandpa observations again. Our grandchildren are still pretty young-- seven years old and younger. Benevolent souls that we are Sue and I created kids playroom, stocked with toys, Legos, dollhouse and dolls, table and chairs, paper and crayons. We figured that might help lure them to come over to visit Grandma and Grandpa. So what to they do! Say and hi, and the run straight down the hall to

the kids' room. By end of their visit, the room is a disaster area. If we ask them to please pick it up, they often resist, overwhelmed by the monumental mess. But if Sue or I were to make a game of it, and offer to yoke up with up them, show them where things go and how they go together, now the task is not so hard for any of us. In fact, it can become fun! Sharing the yoke makes the job lighter!

When we come to Jesus, we are yoked up with him, and he will plod alongside us every step of the way, sharing the workload. He nudges us along on the *right pathways*, and in the process teaches us what needs to be done and how to do it. *Take my yoke upon me and learn from me.* That learning is not memorizing ideas, but is learning like an apprentice learns: learning by doing. Whatever we need to learn to become a missional church, Jesus will show us and send us the Spirit help us, if each personally, and together as a congregation, we will but first come to him, shoulder the yoke with him and with one another and learn by doing.

Learn what? Learn how to love each other and work well together no matter what. Learn from Jesus how to be apprentices yoked with Jesus to do God's saving work—it is God's work, for sure, but our hands, our deeds, our words that cooperate in doing it. And in it doing together, the work is lighter, and lo and behold, we find rest for our souls. But most of all, when faith opens the eyes of our hearts, we see what is suddenly obvious: God is doing marvelous things, everywhere and always. God's love surrounds us day by day. And the love of God never fails. And we are called to live God's love in world. Amen.