

Removing the Yoke

[Isaiah 58:9b-14](#)

[Psalms 103:1-8](#)

[Hebrews 12:18-29](#)

[Luke 13:10-17](#)

Sunday August 21 2016

These are such very wonderful scripture readings today it is hard to know where to begin.

Let's begin where I left off last time I spoke to you from this pulpit.

Then we were looking at a passage from Mark, wherever Jesus went among the farmsteads and marketplaces he healed people where they were, and "As many as touched the hem of his garment were healed."

I hoped to convey to those present that our personal witness is the hem of Christ's garment in the world today. "Frayed and soiled from being drug through the dust and dirt of life, but sometimes for that very reason able to touch others on Christ's behalf, impart a small fraction of God's infinite power, impart that holy power on a human scale, this is how our personal witness reaches others." Among the farmsteads and marketplaces, that is to say the working world outside the church.

How different is the gospel lesson today from Luke. The healing takes place on the holy day, in the holy place. Jesus is teaching, but more important than words and lessons, Jesus is moved to heal a woman unable to stand erect for 18 years. When Jesus heals her with a direct laying on of hands the self-righteous priests deride the woman and also take a swipe at Jesus for making a work day out of the Sabbath.

As I approached these lessons on the importance of how we observe the Sabbath day I thought it would be a short and practical reminder to us all to refrain from burdening each other with business before or after services; a special caution to leave each other free to keep the blessings of worship throughout the Sabbath day and into the week ahead. To refrain from asking the honored juror or lawyer in our midst for legal advice, the physician for medical advice. You know there are members of this parish who know longer worship with us for that very reason.

But of course, I was wrong in this, because this would not be practical advice. I mean what could be more practical than getting some business done amongst us, when we all find ourselves in the same place every week, to go over to Molly or Ron, or me or Bert at coffee hour and ply us with some question of Church business, has this not been the way we have always done things, precisely because it is practical and convenient. It doesn't seem a burden at all, just that in doing so we are unwittingly laying the yoke on others that Sunday worship was instituted to remove.

Then I was forced to realize that there is nothing at all practical about observing the Sabbath, instead searching for what to say today would take me on a journey of exploration to rediscover the blessed silliness of worship. Yes, we are all like the woman Jesus healed in the synagogue, Satan has bound us in such a way that even if we make our way into the holy place on the holy day we may find it difficult to remove the yoke of worldly care, our need for things to be ordered, consequent and effective still rules us we are unable to give control over to God even for one holy hour and a half.

So here We stand, when we leave this sanctuary, on the very unholy ground in this age. We exit this place into a world, where if we found Payless, Ace Hardware or Home Depot closed for the Sabbath we would

feel something were wrong or missing, even though most of the people here can remember a time when stores were closed on Sundays.

Everything we read in scripture not to mention 2800 years of Judeo Christian custom should tell us that shopping on the Sabbath is wrong. It is actually kind of amazing that after nearly 1700 years of Christendom barring business activity on Sunday, we were the generation that caved, and caved without so much as a whimper.

But then, it sure is practical and convenient, and wouldn't it be silly to go back. So here I am, begging you to regain that holy silliness, first I will have to tell you what I mean.

Nine hundred years ago the English people actually spoke a dialect of German. I lived in Germany for five years, and there I learned a language that is the basis for about one third of our own modern English. If you had been a Christian in King Harold's English army, (and let me remind you that there were nearly as many women moving with and supporting the army as men) facing Williams invading French army in 1066 you would have spoken a form of German. If you were a English catholic priest given over to prayer and meditation, and caring for the poor and sick you would be described as selig, just as german catholic priest today with the same attributes would be described as selig meaning rich in soul.

Five hundred years later at the time of Thomas Cromwell and Henry the eighth, a time made famous in Wolf Hall, the intervening years of palace power politics had welded the French of the ruling class, the German of the people and the Latin and Greek of the Church into a modern English we still recognize today in Cranmers book of Common Prayer. A book that served our Episcopal church unchanged from 1549 until 1979. That was the modern English of the high court and high church, but if in 1566 you had traveled to countryside where our Puritan Pilgrims had come

from you might have still heard the country preachers called Sillymen. Interestingly, many of the old English usages were exported to America, so that Hawthorne calls the preacher who seduced Hester Prynne in “The Scarlet Letter” a sillyman although not without considerable irony.

By the 18th century Merchantilism and industry had so over powered the English speaking soul, that silly, once a positive attribute of god indwelling, came to mean an inability to get down to business, a foolish or worthless person.

But in Germany selig never lost its positive connotation. Where we use words of Greek and Latin derivation to come up with highfalutin words like Psychiatrist, the Germans who invented Psychiatry use two german words Seelenarzt, literally Doctor of the soul. To this very day in Germany there are two parallel pathways to becoming a board certified Psychiatrist, one route is for a medical doctor to complete the board training, the other is for an ordained member of the Clergy to do the same.

Our lives have become so heavily weighted toward the material and temporal, with English being universally prized as the language of business, that now we think it the most natural thing in the world to be advised to rebalance the financial assets in our retirement portfolios yearly, but if a trusted spiritual advisor were to ask us to rebalance the substance of our very existence to include at least one seventh part holy silliness we would not even understand what we were being asked to do.

But that is exactly what is being asked of us in all of the readings today. We are asked to indwell the life eternal in the here and now of our Sabbath observance, to cast off the yoke of Satan that binds us to worldly

care and the feeling that this earthly body and earthly home is all there is to life.

800 years of speaking a language that molds itself to use in commerce and science at the expense of empathy and human reciprocity, heightened by a dozen years of commercial internet has made us all into modern cynics who, as Oscar Wilde observed “know the price of everything, and the value of nothing.”

What is the value of making a cup of coffee for a homeless person? In the shark filled cultural-linguistic water of our English language that we have swam in for so long everything is transactional, and very likely a zero sum game at that.

“Teaching a man to fish is good, giving a man a fish is not.” Still, something deep in our humanness knows this is tommy rot.”

I know how to fish but I am not a particularly good at it. My best friend and neighbor is a great fisherman. When he catches a fish he often shares his catch with us, it is a blessing for him and a blessing for us.

The Latin and German words Misericordia and Barmherzigkeit are translated in English by the word Mercy but they do not have the same meaning. Our word mercy is transactional representing power and wealth on the part of the giver of Mercy, a crumb to be bestowed on the weak and impoverished to elicit gratitude. Whereas the Latin and German words very literally mean poor of heart, owning humility and recognizing our common humanity, the radical equality of each of us in the eyes of God. Poor of heart echoes Jesus when he said, blessed are the poor in spirit. How many sermons and Sunday school lessons in English have blathered on about what poor in spirit might possibly mean, because our English language cannot comprehend that poor is good in

the eyes of God, that if the rich young lawyer really wants to have eternal life, he must sell all his possessions as Jesus told him.

Our Sunday worship is an absolutely essential reset for our world-besotted souls, Here, in common worship, when we celebrate our Sabbath we can restore ourselves to the complete beings God created us to be. We can remove the yoke and step in the direction of life eternal.

But just how far can we go in that direction? does the taste of life eternal last only an hour and a half when we rub shoulders with the angels at the Lord's table each week, then crash through the plate glass into worldly life when we strap on the feedbag at coffee hour? Or do our steps into eternal life manage to make it through coffee hour as we continue to show hospitality to Angels among us unawares? With practice can the blessing of our worship extend throughout the day giving us full measure of eternal life for the whole one day out of seven as commanded by god? Or does the blessing of tending God's holy garden on the Sabbath day return to us at the end of every day when we lay down worldly care and walk with God in the cool of the evening.

Just how enduring the blessed "silliness" of our worship becomes depends on how fully we have entered the holy city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem shown us by the writer of Hebrews.

Whether we have removed the yoke before entering into the presence of "innumerable angels in festal gathering, and the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven." When we recite the Nicene Creed we do so in consort with all those precious souls gone before us. When we sing Holy, Holy, Holy, do you imagine it mere earthly practice for the real thing by and by, no, that chorus is ongoing and eternal, our liturgy is an invitation to join in and sing along, now and forever.

Only a few Sunday's ago I sat in the pews with Janet in front of me and Melisa and Carol behind me to my right and left. I was enveloped in a cloud of heavenly voices, they removed the yoke from my shoulders and pointed me in the direction of the eternal presence of our God..

And what about our David's, one removes the yoke each week with his music, one removes the yoke by forsaking his own worship to bring Godly play to youngsters down stairs, and the third brings his catch of crab in season to bless the members of the congregation.

Margaret, Albert and Ron remove the yoke and point the way to eternal life in bringing holy communion to those who cannot be with us.

Let me go on

The entire altar guild removes a very considerable yoke to provide us with the holy elements of our spiritual refreshment.

Our wonderful readers follow in a two thousand year tradition of removing of the yoke and pointing the way to eternal life through the hearing of the Word of God.

Our coffee hour hosts remove a yoke to provide us with the refreshment of continued fellowship.

The flowers Susan arranges removes a yoke to beautify our place of worship.

Ted removes a yoke in bringing us our weekly forum

Craig and Joy remove a yoke by continually showing us God's hand alive in our backyards.

Diana, and Carol and Bev remove the yoke by faithfully tending our church gardens

Julie and Laura and Ray remove the yoke of the everyday to enliven our festivals with joyous hospitality.

I have called some of my fellow worshippers by name not because they are better than any others gathered here, but because God calls us each by name. Yes, we are all equally precious in God's eyes. Here in this holy city, there is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female, free or slave, Republican or Democrat, young or old, healthy or sick, (the reality of those distinctions if there is any, lay outside this city of the living God) here in this place of restoration, here in this place on this Sabbath day we all have equal access to eternal life through faith in Christ Jesus.

Six days a week we speak the shallow Language of commerce and pride and zero sum transactions, and we are made hard by doing so. Here let us learn to speak a new language to soften our hearts, to truly learn that the silliness of God is greater than the wisdom of men.

I came to you today hoping to convey meanings lost from our modern vocabulary, it could be I made no sense or the message got lost in translation, so let me finish where we began, with the crystal clarity of Isaiah,

If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,
if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.

The LORD will lead you eternally,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath,
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;
if you call the sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the LORD honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs;
then you shall take delight in the LORD,
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,
I am the Lord your God and I approve this message.

And the People said. . .