

Sermon- June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018      Text- Matthew 11:28-30

## That's No Yoke

Grace and peace to you and from our Lord Jesus Christ. A short Gospel this morning. Take my yoke upon you because it's easy.

A story. I love stories. There was once a bank president who had a real problem. He had lost or misplaced the key to the main vault and the bank was due to open in 30 minutes. Not one of his employees had a spare key. At that moment, a brand new employee volunteers that he could help. The new employee takes a bobby pin out of his wallet and picked the lock of that vault in about 30 seconds. The bank president says "wow, where did you learn to do that?" The new employee says, "Yale". The bank president, impressed with Ivy League credentials, says, "what's your name young man?" The new employee says, "Yack Yohnson." Get it? Yale, Yack Yohnson. That's a funny Yoke.

So Jesus in our Gospel is talking about a different kind of yoke. Come to me, you who are tired. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. Living in a non-agrarian society, many of us are unfamiliar with the concept of the yoke. After I had retired from Our Saviours in Appleton, I served another Our Savior's in Lessor, Wi., near Bonduel. I was there about two years. Much time was spent at the member's farms in and around the Bonduel area. In that area were many Amish farms where the yoke was used because of the Amish aversion to machinery. Great area to visit. Link Country Store, outside of Bonduel, an Amish store where you will be transported to the 1950's. Or The Red Rooster diner where my good friend, Bill Kolaske serves up organic egg dishes. Back to the yoke. The yoke is heavy. Weighs about 70 lbs. The top part goes on the shoulder of the animal and the bottom part under the neck. Of course the yoke can also be used by people. You might have seen pictures of people carrying buckets of water using a yoke. Very uncomfortable, very tough. Yokes were not fun. Utilitarian perhaps but not enjoyable.

For sure, the people of the first century understood the concept of the yoke. When Jesus uttered these words in the Gospel there were certainly mixed reactions. The first being that Jesus was joking. Some probably laughed. For them, there was nothing easy about a yoke. The concept had to do with hard times, and

long days. Most likely only a few people who listened got the message that Jesus was trying to give them. That Jesus would help them with the burdens of life. In other words, they would still have the yolk, but, with the help of Jesus it would be easier, more manageable.

You see, when Jesus invites you to take on his yoke, he is not saying that he would help you pay off your master card bill. Or heal your loved ones. He is not saying that he will mend your broken relationships. But what he is saying is that he will help us carry the load.

And certainly, many of us have very big loads that we are carrying. Feels much more than a 70 pound yoke.

Many of us are carrying a burden of debt, and the worry and shame that it represents is killing you. Others are carrying the weight of family problems, of broken relationships, or job concerns, or family members sick or dying. Still others bear the load of guilt from something you did or didn't do decades ago and the regret wears on you. I call this Lutheran Guilt and it is powerful.

In other words, Jesus is offering to help you carry the load. Not to take it away, but to help you make it through the long nights. To forgive the guilt that comes with burden. To take away the shame that you feel. To let you rest again. To laugh again. To set you free from the yoke that you have carried alone.

How? Because the yoke of Jesus asks only two things of you and me. To love God and to love our neighbor. Not to perform, not to impress, not to be perfect, but to love God and neighbor.

One of my favorite prophets is the prophet Micah. For sure Jesus had him in mind when he talked about the yoke. Here is what Micah said about what is required of us as his children.

“What does the Lord require of you?  
But to do justice, love kindness  
And to walk humbly with your God.”

That's the yoke of Jesus.

There is a legend - might be true. It was about President Lincoln. This was a time when truth and honesty was abundant in the White House. Lincoln wandered upon a slave auction. Another great part of the history of our country, or not. A young girl was standing on the slave block, emptiness in her eyes. Lincoln started bidding on the young girl and won the bid. As he was walking away with his new property, this young girl, he said to her, "young lady you are free".

What does that mean? She asked.

It means you are free.

Free to do what?

Free to do anything you want, said Lincoln

Does that mean I can say anything I want?

Yes, you can say anything you want!

Does that mean I can be anything I want?

Yes, you can be anything you want.

Does that mean I can go wherever I want to go?

Yes, you can go wherever you want to go!

Then the girl said- I want to go with you.

Legend has it that she did go with Lincoln and became part of the staff at the White House.

That's the point of the Gospel. Free to be what we want to be, and knowing that God will help us carry the load. Remember the story about Jesus calming the seas. He got in the boat. He is our boats, whatever or wherever they are. We are free to live our lives, and free to be forgiven when our steps lead us astray. Some of us entered our sanctuary this weekend with sin and shame on our minds, but we leave knowing that we are free to love God and neighbor. And that's no joke or yoke. What's your name? Yake Yohnson. Jesus' yoke is easy and light. Because he is with us, helping us carry the load.

Amen- let it be so.