

Scripture:

Matthew 11:16-30

“Stop judging, give thanks, settle in.”

An alternate title for today’s message could be ----- stop judging ----- give thanks --- and take my yoke upon you.

Stop – judging --- give thanks ----- and take my yoke upon you ---- or settle in ----- as in settle in to the role I --- Christ --- have created just for you.

Our passage from Matthew’s gospel today has 3 distinct sections --- and if we read them carefully we soon see why they are set along side each other.

First --- in verses 16-24 ----- the theme is judgment.

Then in verses ---- 25-27 ---- the theme is thanksgiving.

And finally in the last 3 verses --- 28-30 ----- the theme is ---- “settle in” --- settle in and take my --- Christ’s yoke upon you --- accept a life in Christ and settle in to Christian discipleship.

It’s as if Jesus says stop judging and whining and complaining ----- give thanks to God --- and then settle into ----- take the yoke of discipleship upon you ----- for by doing these things you will find rest for your soul --- and peace in your spirit.

The first few verses of our passage today -----

“To what can I compare this generation?

They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to others:

We played the flute for you and you did not dance;

We sang a dirge and you did not mourn.”

In other words --- no matter what was presented --- no matter what the options were ----- the people complained and judged.

No matter what was done ---- it wasn’t enough ---- it wasn’t right --- they wanted something else.

One kind of music was played and they didn't like it ---- so another kind was played and they still didn't like it --- regardless of what was played it wasn't quite right --- the people were picky and judgmental ---- thinking they knew best.

Sound familiar? ---- "This generation." --- that Jesus spoke of is every generation to varying degrees.

Every generation has certain pre-conceived ideas as to what God should play or do --- and what God shouldn't play or do.

Every generation ---- ever person in varying degrees even ----- has pre-conceived ideas as to how God works and reveals Himself --- and if what God is doing doesn't always fit with what we want and what we expect we sometimes ignore it --- just as the children ignored the music and wanted other songs.

Listen to the next verses --- because they drive this point home.

Beginning at verse 18 --- "For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"

"For John came neither eating or drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, 'He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'"

In other words ----- John the Baptist couldn't have been from God --- He has a demon ----- because well ----- "He had a weird diet --- locusts and honey ---- and he pretty much stayed to himself --- God would never come like that --- or act like he did."

And then Jesus --- "Well clearly He couldn't be from God either because He ate and drank with everyone --- He was a glutton and a drunkard ----- and He sat with anybody and everybody ---- including the lowest of the low --- tax collectors and sinners --- God would surely never come like that --- or act as He did."

Neither John nor Jesus are of God --- because God would never come like either of them --- so the people said.

Those people ---- like most people ---- had pre-conceived ideas as to what it would look like when God came and spoke among them ---- and ----- for them neither John the Baptist nor Jesus of Nazareth fit the mold.

It's as if they said ---- "We will know God's servants when they come --- and neither of these fit the mold --- neither this John nor that Jesus are what we expect so --- they clearly are not from God ---- we'd surely recognize them if they were."

And of course nothing could be further from the truth ----- John served God like few before or after him and Jesus was God's Son and the Saviour of the world.

We can all learn from this passage ---- precisely because we all do exactly this ---- from time to time and to some degree or another.

We all fix in our minds what a servant of God looks like ----- thinking we are clearly and infallibly able to recognize precisely who God sends --- when and why ----- and yet scripture reminds us that God constantly surprises us with the unexpected.

God moves in unexpected ways and we have to come to terms with this and be open and ready for God to reveal Himself in ways that we would never think of.

The scriptures are jammed packed with example after example of God moving --- working --- and revealing Himself in the unexpected.

Who would have expected that God would have decided to start His mighty nation with a couple of old wrinkled ---- sitting in their retirement home residence people like Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham and Sarah who were not only very old --- but Abraham and Sarah who had in their primes ----- in their virile youth ---- never been able to have children before.

And yet this is precisely who God chooses to make His mighty nation.

Who would have guessed that of all Jesse's sons the smallest and weakest and leanest and youngest --- David ---- would be King.

And who would have guessed that this same David would be the one to fight and conquer the mighty Goliath --- no one --- and yet that's who God chose and that's precisely what happened.

Who would have thought that God would choose the tongue tied stuttering Moses to be His spokesperson ---- instead of his older and far more eloquent brother Aaron ---- no one ---- and yet God did.

And the list goes on and on --- including God choosing an unknown teen aged virgin girl to give birth to the Messiah in an animal's feeding trough in a barn in the middle of nowhere ---- few if any --- and yet God did precisely this.

God often chooses the less than likely ones and the less than likely ways.

God often chooses the ones and the ways that no one ever expected.

He so often shatters the pre-conceived notions of who and what and how --- and opens our eyes and hearts to new realities --- and that's precisely why we sing things like --- "Open the eyes of my heart Lord"---- to remind us that yes we need God to open us up to new possibilities because we can't always do it ourselves ---- no matter how hard we try.

Jesus looks at the children in the market square ---- never happy no matter what music was played ---- and says don't be like them --- don't be closed minded.

Jesus looks at how He and John the Baptist were received --- tossed aside as ---- "Not from God!" ---- and says don't be like that --- don't just toss people aside because they don't fit your idea of how things should be.

Unfortunately people judge --- and have ideas as to what they want and how God works ----- to the point that they become blind to God working in their very midst.

In verses 20-24 Jesus talks about certain cities that were blind and indifferent to the miracles He performed there.

Korazin --- Bethsaida --- and Capernaum ----- are all blind and deaf and unchanged --- unrepentant ---- despite the fact that Jesus was there among them and displayed God's goodness and God's saving grace time and time again.

Just like the finicky ---- judgmental children --- just like the -----“we know best --- we know God --- and these men aren't from God” people who rejected John the Baptist and Jesus ----- so the people of ---- Korazin --- Bethsaida --- and Capernaum --- think they know best and aren't moved at all by Jesus' time and ministry there.

Stop judging ----- is the message Jesus has for these children --- these people --- these cities.

And so ----- part of the message Jesus has for us here today --- as we read this passage is exactly the same ----- stop judging.

Stop judging who needs help ---- and just help people.

Stop judging who God may choose and try to see God in every person you meet.

Stop judging how God might reveal Himself to you --- or employ you in His great plan --- and concern yourself more with making yourself open and available for God to use you as He sees fit.

Stop judging --- we all do it ----- but the gospel reminds us today that we must work at not doing it.

Stop judging ----- and then ---- give thanks.

Stop judging and instead give thanks.

Picking it up at verse 25 from our gospel passage today ---- “At that time Jesus said, “I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have” ----- and He goes on to thank God for what God has done.

Despite the judging ----- whining children ---- who don't like the music no matter what kind of music is played --- despite the people who said John wasn't of God because he didn't eat much and kept to himself --- and Jesus wasn't from God because he ate and drank too much --- and with all the wrong people.

Despite the fact that Korazin --- Bethsaida --- and Capernaum --- ignored Jesus and His ministry and were moved not at all ----- by the work God did in their midst.

Despite all of this ----- Jesus still finds a way to be thankful and praise God.

Jesus was no doubt saddened by the judgmental ---- finicky --- blind to the beauty in their midst --- attitudes of so many people and communities that He ministered to --- and yet He was still able to give thanks and praise God despite of this.

So it must be with us ---- regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in ---- we must always find it within ourselves to be thankful and praise God.

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

Once we have stopped judging as a way of life.

And once we have given thanks and praise to God.

Then we come to Christ ----- then we find rest for our souls.

I don't know about you --- but I find these some of the most comforting verses in all of scripture.

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

When we come to Christ we often find the rest we have been longing for --- the rest in the assurance that we have arrived precisely where we were to supposed arrive.

And then we learn.

And then we grow.

And then we come to understand that the yoke of Christ is custom made and far lighter than one we carry outside of Him.

Yes there is a cost in following Christ and taking on his yoke --- the cost of discipleship --- but it is far lighter than a life apart from God without Christ.

Scottish New Testament scholar Will Barclay --- speaks about these last few verses in Matthew's gospel today brilliantly and faithfully.

He says there is a legend that Jesus --- remember He was a carpenter's son.

He speaks about the legend that Jesus made the best ox-yokes in all of Galilee ----- and how people from all over the country side would come to Jesus to buy the very best ox-yokes that money could buy.

It has been suggested that the sign above the door of the carpenter's shop in Nazareth where Jesus worked read --- "My yokes fit well."

"My yokes fit well."

And it may well be that in speaking of yokes in Mathew's gospel today Jesus is looking back into His days as a yoke making carpenter in what we now refer to as His lost years --- the years that Jesus grew up that we know so very little about.

Either way --- whether it is true that Jesus made yokes or not ---- when Jesus says my yoke fits well part of what He is saying is that if you come and follow me --- if you put on my yoke --- if you become one of my disciples -- --- the life you will have will not be one meant to cause you pain and suffering ---- instead the yoke I give you ----- the ministry I call you to will be custom made and fit and sized just for you and only you --- just as each ox would have had a custom made yoke.

The life God has in store for us ---- the ministry to which we are called to in Christ ---- is made only and exclusively for us --- and us alone.

When Jesus says--- “my yoke is easy” ---- part of what He means is that the yoke He has in store for us is custom made --- and it is far easier to wear it --
- than to walk about in life with the yoke of the world casts upon us.

And when Jesus says my burden is light part of what He means is that the burden we carry as a disciple of His --- will be far less --- far lighter than the burden of the world.

And part of the reason for this is that the yoke of Christ and the responsibilities of Christian discipleship are one’s that we carry and live out in love.

There’s the story of how an old man comes upon a little boy carrying a still smaller boy on his back.

And the old mans says to the boy carrying the other little boy ----- “that must be a heavy burden for you to carry.”

And the boy responds --- “Oh no ---- him --- he’s no burden ---- he’s my little brother --- and he’s not well just now so I’m carrying Him home to heal.”

The “burden” ---- or task ---- which is done in love --- and carried out in love is always a light burden.

That’s how it is with Christ ----- His yoke is easy and His burden is light ---- precisely because the yoke and the task is carried out in love.

When we give over our expectations --- and pre-conceived notions as to how --- and why --- and through whom God is working.

When we get over ourselves and our expectations and work at not judging others and situations in life.

When we do this we are able to see things differently and we are able to find all kinds of things to be thankful for.

And once we give over our expectations and judgmental spirit and give thanks for what God has provided to us --- then and only then are we able to take Christ upon ourselves and give ourselves over to him.

Then are we able to take His yoke upon us and live out our calling in Christ.

“Stop judging ----- give thanks --- settle in.”

Settle in meaning settle in to our role in God’s amazing rescue plan of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Settle in meaning accept our role --- take His yoke upon us and live in ----- for --- and with Christ.

If the world has tired us out.

If we’re weary and burdened by what we see around us in our culture ---- as always --- Christ is the solution --- Christ is the way to go and the person to know.

For His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Oh how good it is ----- to live life in Christ.

To find rest for our souls in Him.

To learn from Him.

To take His yoke --- the one He has made for us and only us.

“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”

Is a reminder of the gracious --- humble ---- gentle Lord who beckons us come ----- follow me.

And so may we do so ---- may we take His yoke upon us each and every day ---- in new and faithful ways --- growing in our Christian discipleship as He so leads us.

Amen.