

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2020, Year A

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30, Romans 8:1

***“Yoked with Christ”***

I am amazed by the wisdom that Holy Scripture has in store for us. Today we are blessed with the Words of Jesus, and also from the Apostle Paul – that should be very encouraging to all of us. In today's Holy Gospel, Jesus says to each of 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.”* (Matthew 11:28-30) These words are a promise from Jesus to those that He loves. They are a shelter in the storms of everyday life – comfortable words to be sure! Some of those are the words that you hear me say – and because of the pandemic I cannot walk down the aisle. Those are the first words from the “comfortable words” in our prayer book – “come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

Yesterday we celebrated July 4<sup>th</sup>, Independence Day for our country, and I can't help but be reminded of some of the words inscribed on a plaque on the base of the Statue of Liberty, a part of the poem, The New Colossus, by Emma Lazarus, which reads, *“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”* These are not all of the words, but most assuredly for me, the most memorable. Not by any measure as powerful, or promising as the words of Jesus, but encouraging, none the less. My grandparents came through Ellis Island, and they came into our country as immigrants. Encouraging words on the Statue of Liberty proclaim freedom for all of us, but not nearly as comforting as the words from Jesus. The human condition is this – we were born into a fallen and sinful world, and for that reason we are always searching for comfort and solace – but the good news is that that comfort can only be found in one place – the promises and love of Jesus Christ! These words are only recorded in one place – the Holy Bible!

The world loves to remind us how fallen we are, but Jesus wants us to know how loved and precious we are, enough to give His life for us so that we might live for all eternity in His presence. That is really worth celebrating!

Like a shepherd who does not want even one of His sheep to go astray – Jesus makes this precious invitation, especially for those who are not exactly feeling worthy. Do you ever have days like that? You look in the mirror and you are not all that happy with what you see? Maybe you did something the day before? The words *“weary and burdened”* are all encompassing for us. People who consider themselves far from perfect and who cannot see themselves as worthy or even good – but instead when they look in the mirror they see tarnished silver, chipped china, a dented can or fender – seeing themselves as “damaged goods” – but God sees a different image. The image that He sees is precious and of great worth to Jesus. Jesus is asking anyone who is tired of carrying around shame for things that they have done in the past, things they don't want ANYONE to EVER know about; who are feeling guilt for actions – or even feeling that there is nothing that

they can do to erase their past. Boy does the enemy love to dig you with that! He has this big long needle and he loves to stick you with it, to remind you of things you have done. Jesus says – “forget them!” You know there is no way I can feel good by myself, but to drop their shame, their guilt, their hurt and pain right now and come to Him – as He asks us to do. Jesus knows what it is like to be human – and so He makes a personal invitation to simply come – turn away from whatever has us feeling less than worthy – tarnished or damaged goods - and come to Him. His invitation is unconditional just as is His promise to provide rest. He is offering rest – coverage, protection, unlike any insurance policy - and a relationship – “*rest for your soul.*” Jesus is offering the fulfillment of Jeremiah 6:16 to find “*where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.*” Jesus, who is “*the way, and the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6) is offering perfect rest – eternal rest - not just for your broken, tired body – but for your spirit – for your soul! Jesus’ rest covers all of the things that we have been conditioned to think make us unworthy to even approach Him. His rest gives us new eyes to see ourselves as He sees us – and that is – precious and of great value!

Just two weeks ago, we heard Jesus say in Matthew 10:29-31, “*Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.*” One thing I know is absolutely certain - God doesn’t make mistakes and He made all of us in His image and likeness: “*God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;"*” (Genesis 1:26) “*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*” (Genesis 1:27) Mankind was made in the image and likeness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – as it was written - “*Our image.*” Despite the presence of sin in our lives – and we are all sinners - in which Adam and Eve tarnished the image of God within themselves, and passed that damaged likeness on to all of their descendants, (Romans 5:12), today, we still bear the image of God (James 3:9), but sadly, we also bear the scars of sin.

The good news is that when God redeems someone – and they hear His call, He begins to restore the original image “*and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*” (Ephesian 4:24) That redemption is only available by God’s grace, through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. He calls us to be renewed from the sin that separates us from God. The Apostle Paul reminds us “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” It is through faith in Jesus Christ that we are saved – not by our own works. That means that there is nothing that we can do to earn heaven! Any tarnished image that we see or feel of ourselves is transformed by our belief and faith in Jesus. Through Christ, and we are made new creations in the likeness of God. Paul reminds us: “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled*

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2020, Year A

*us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

This invitation by Jesus is far more than meets the eye! Jesus offers to teach us as well. He is not just saying believe in Me and have a nice day – but He offers for to be taking His yoke and submitting to Him, the One who is gentle, meek, caring and concerned for us. He is not just giving us a job to do – or outfit us with a yoke – to work alone as His follower – but Jesus promises to be right by our side!

I think you may find this illustration helpful. I have used this many times. There was an old farmer plowing with a team of oxen. He had one huge ox and one very small ox, teamed together by a dual yoke. The big one towered over the little one that was sharing the work with Him. In truth, the way that they are yoked – the big one is doing all of the work, and the smaller one is not carrying any weight to speak of, but is being trained or “broken in,” learning how to do the job. Just as Jesus says in today’s Holy Gospel – *“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.”* The way oxen are usually yoked is an equal load, but when we are yoked with Jesus – He bears the load and we who are yoked to Him share in the joy and accomplishment of the labor but without the burden.

Jesus became human and took on flesh so that He would experience the pain of being in human form – of what we experience in being “less than perfect” on earth – and so this special invitation is filled with grace, mercy, and love. What He offers - comes from His own inner character, the character of God Himself; His gentleness, His warmth is offered to those who repent – who “turn away” from sinful behavior and to turn to Him. All of us who are weighed down by burdens, whether they be moral, physical, emotional, financial, or whatever – Jesus offers what He has in Himself, encouraging us to believe that He will not stand over us, waiting for us to mess up, waiting for our next big mistake. No, instead this invitation is an opportunity for us to see who God the Father really is, and to come into His loving and welcoming presence. He said time and time again that He will never leave us or forsake us! Now that is good news!

I want to share with you, what for me, is one of the most encouraging statements in all of Holy Scripture. The Apostle Paul writes these encouraging words: *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”* (Romans 8:1-2) Hear those words and next time you look in the mirror think of those words - *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* When we make the decision to stop turning our backs on God – which is really what we do when we sin, and turn back to Him – in repentance – then Jesus frees us from the shackles of sin that bind us. When we are in a real relationship with Jesus then *“there is no condemnation.”* There is no need for us to

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2020, Year A

continue to carry around any guilt or shame, pain, doubts, or fear – for God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has freed us. Just as we made a profession of faith in accepting Jesus as Savior, we need to accept the gift that He gives us in His rest – *“because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”* (1John 4:4)

In closing this morning, in my daily devotions I came upon these words from the Apostle Paul from the end of the very same chapter, chapter 8 of the Epistle we heard this morning – Romans 8. These words go right into today’s world – with all of the things that are going on - *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38-39) Simply put – we are yoked with Christ!