

The following sermon was preached at Oakmont Presbyterian Church by Rev. Dr. Wilson at the early worship service on October 22, 2006.

The Secret of the Easy Yoke

Matthew 11: 28-30

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

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My hardest week this year came in August.

To the average person, August is a part of summer: iced tea, sitting on the porch and walks after the heat of the day. For those who work in a church August is a race to prepare for September.

My hardest week was that week in August when we had 4 funerals. Towards the end of that week, I had written 3 funeral messages. As I thought about the 4th message I knew that I was used up. Some things can be accomplished by persevering after exhaustion has begun – raking leaves would be one such task, but not funeral messages.

I know from past experience that trying to create something from exhaustion is like trying to wring a drink from a dry rag. There’s nothing there to be had.

So I went to my office and closed first the door and then my eyes. I opened my heart to God and said “God, I want to speak your words of comfort, hope and faith to these people who are hurting, but I’m used up. What do you want me to say?”

With that simple prayer, I sat

Waiting
Listening
Breathing

After some time, the idea of a candle came to my mind

Lighting the candle – birth
Snuffing the candle – death
Invisible flame – resurrection

And now that I think back, not only did the idea come, but also the energy to put it into message form.

“Come to me all you who labor and are heavily laden....”

Open your hearts
Open your ears
God will speak AND
Give you energy to follow.

When Jesus spoke to his followers, his message was not just for weary days, but for those who have wearied in the search for truth and purpose.

“Take my yoke upon you,” Jesus said.

Yoke – a piece of wood that bound 2 ox together

Walked together
Worked together
Inexperienced ox learned from the experienced ox

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

This would be a disheartening call for weary people EXCEPT that Jesus promised

My yoke is easy and
My burden is light.

We remember that Jesus’ father was a carpenter and Jesus would have known about yokes.

The word he used for “easy” meant *well-fitting*.

Oxen were taken to carpenter who measured the ox and then roughed in the yoke.

The ox was brought back for the final precise tooling of the yoke.

Jesus was saying “My yoke is tailor-made for you”. It will fit us perfectly.

He also promised “my burden is light”.

The yoke not only connected one ox to the other, but also to a wagon.

There was a burden, but burdens born in love are perceived as light.

A man came upon another who was carrying on his back a young crippled boy.

The man said, “That is quite a burden you are bearing” to which the other man replied, “That’s no burden; that’s my wee brother.”

Jesus yoke is easy and his burden is light.

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What we see in Jesus is wonderful:

Peace
Purpose
Power

Truth
Trust

Toughness
Tenderness

These are not proprietary elements given only to the savior of the world, they are the characteristics that grow in all who take his yoke upon them and learn from him.

When Jesus was born, the angel proclaimed that he was “Immanuel” which means “God with us”.

Now Jesus invites us to

unite with him
learn from him
grow with him

and he promises that his yoke is tailor-made for you and his burden is light.

That’s his invitation and promise.

What will you do?
How will you live?

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