

Food for Thought

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday, Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30, Jesus seems schizophrenic. As the passage opens, our Lord is on a bit of a rant, irked that the crowds complained that John the Baptist lived a solitary life, fasting in the desert, but these same crowds also complained about Jesus being a partier, feasting with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus has had enough of this fickle generation! There is no pleasing them.

But then, just a few verses later, Jesus says some of the most tender and beloved verses in all of Scripture, "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest for your souls. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." All of the sudden, He seems to have put his anger aside and done a complete turn around in his attitude with his followers. Now he seems to sympathize with what they're going through and offers to give them a break. What just happened here? Why is the Lord so volatile in his mood today? And most importantly, which Jesus are we going to hear from in the pulpit this Sunday?!

We certainly know which Jesus we WANT to hear from. This is a holiday weekend, a time for BBQ's and family get togethers. Surely, this would be a great Sunday to preach about taking the rest that so many of us need so badly. Maybe Jesus really does want you and me to take more vacations. Maybe he is suggesting that we can take a break from putting something in the offering plate. Or even better, maybe Jesus is offering us a break from having to be good all the time. That would make a pleasant sermon on this Fourth of July weekend!

But I think that something more substantial is going on here. I think that Jesus is right in the middle of his tongue lashing of the crowds, and he suddenly realizes that the people are even more confused than he is! They are pulled every which way, not knowing how to behave or who they should follow. This realization touches the Lord's heart, and He is moved to tenderness. Jesus wants to offer his followers a clear, simple (but not easy) road through life. He invites you and me to dump all the baggage of finding our identity through shallow people and shallow activities and follow Him instead.

Jesus calls us to put on his yoke. Now, all of us urban-types need to know that a "yoke" is a harness designed to tie two oxen together so that they can pull better as a team. And Jesus is offering to be yoked with you! It doesn't mean that we won't have work to do, that being a Christian isn't tough, but it does mean that that we have a partner in our labors.

It may not be a day at the beach, but it's amazing how two are always greater than the sum of their parts, especially when one of them is the Lord of Creation!

- 1) In what ways can you be fickle in your opinions or your allegiances?
- 2) What are some things that distract you or pull you away from Jesus?
- 3) If you are willing, describe a burden that you would like Jesus to help you carry this week.