

“Live Freely and Lightly”

Providence United Methodist Church

Message by DD Adams

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The epistle lesson comes from the 7th chapter of Romans, verses 17 through 20. The gospel lesson is taken from the 11th chapter of Matthew, verses 16 through 19, and verses 25 through 30. Both passages are from Eugene Peterson’s translation *The Message*. First I’ll read the text from Romans. The Apostle Paul is speaking in this passage.

Paul says he needs something *more* than God’s command and states, “For if I know the law but still can’t keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t *do* it. I decide to do good, but I don’t *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.”

Now from Matthew’s text—Jesus is speaking in this passage. “How can I account for this generation? The people have been like spoiled children whining to their parents, ‘We wanted to skip rope, and you were always too tired; we wanted to talk, but you were always too busy.’ John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riffraff. Opinion polls don’t count for much, do they? The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

Abruptly Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You’ve concealed your ways from sophisticates and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.”

Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son operation, coming out of Father and Son intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen.

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Dear God who is full of grace, and Christ, who helps us carry the load, open our ears wide and change our hearts. Help us to understand more fully that you have paved a way for us. Show us how to live more freely and lightly. Amen.

Reading from Eugene Peterson’s translation we’re reminded of the fact that we’re a rebellious and contrary people. We often resist God’s leading. We think it’s easier to go our own way. We can even think it’s easier to carry life’s load all by ourselves. No wonder we’re tired, worn out, and burned out on religion—it’s lonely and exhausting to feel so alone!

The next picture is the way many of us do this load carrying thing. We’re yoked to Christ, but we resist, we’re stubborn, and we insist on our own way. Just imagine how tired this donkey must feel—always kicking and pulling to go in the other direction. Now the last picture is more how it’s supposed to be. Here we have a picture of an older ox and a younger one. The younger one is learning from the older one. The load is divided between the two, they feel a sense of

companionship, and the work gets done in an efficient and timely manner. Which picture do you see yourself in?

In Matthew's text, Jesus points it out that it's almost impossible to make people happy—especially if you're a leader. They criticized John the Baptist and said he was crazy. He never drank a drop of liquor in his life! They criticized Jesus for eating with sinners and being a drunkard. Well, I guess it's hard to keep everybody happy. Somebody is always criticizing you for something, and it can be easy to adopt the mind-set that we're never good enough—doesn't matter what we do. Well guess what—YOU'RE RIGHT! We never will be good enough.

Let me read the text from Romans 7 again. "The power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't *do* it. I decide to do good, but I don't *really* do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time."

Let's ask ourselves . . . why are we trying to carry the load by ourselves? Why are we such a know-it-all, and why are we so self-sufficient that we think we know the way? Jesus said he's revealed himself not to the intelligent and wise person, but to the infant! Hmmm, most infants I know have a pretty limited amount of knowledge. They'd do best to let someone else show *them* how to do this life thing.

On the back of the bulletin I have some food for thought. Charles Finney, an American Presbyterian minister and leader in the Second Great Awakening in the U.S., said there are many who profess to be servants of Christ. Finney said they complain about what Christ calls us to be. To them the commandments of Christ are heavy. They say Christ's yoke is too difficult and hard to endure. Finney said

these are the ones that will sing, “Reason I love, her counsels weigh, and all her words approve; but still, I find it hard to obey, and harder still to love.” What do you think? Do you find it’s easy or difficult to be yoked to Christ?

Christ said his yoke is easy and his burden is light. But this is what the apostle Paul cried out in Romans 7, “. . . who will deliver me from this burden . . .” This is pretty different from what Jesus said. Jesus said the weary and heavy laden (Matt 11: 28) are called to a new kind of learning, but that doesn’t mean we won’t mess up a lot of the time.

Learning from Jesus means we’re open to a new way of doing things. We’re willing to change, and that means changing how we do things! You’ve heard the saying, “But we’ve always done it that way!” This kind of learning considers new ways of doing things. Christ already knows we’re going to make lots of mistakes along the way, but the good news is that we’re headed in God’s direction and that we’re willing to learn and change!

When Jesus says his yoke is easy he means its “suitable, appropriate, and easy to wear.” This yoke is made of grace and mercy and is unforced and patient with us. We’ll never be good enough, smart enough, beautiful enough, or anything enough . . . not to our congregation, not to our spouse, not to our boss, and not to ourselves. So you say you’re worn out? Burned out on religion? Okay. Fine, here’s the way you can get your rest.

Put on this yoke of grace, and let’s stop presuming we know the way and know it all. The “rest” God offers helps us to relax and breathe. It means we need to come to him. It means we need to stop trying so hard and realize we’re not all we thought we were. Christ has made a way, and it’s easy! Let’s pick up that easy yoke that fits us perfectly and start walking alongside the one who will help us

carry the load of life. God's grace is that pace that's unforced, and it's chock full of love and mercy too. Let's start living life more freely and lightly.

Let's pray. God of grace and mercy, help us put on this yoke you offer that's easy and comfortable. Guide our thoughts and direct our steps to go your way. Help us relax and breathe. Show us this is the true freedom we've been looking for as we accept your invitation to join and unite more fully with your presence. Amen.