

**St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church**  
Keller, Texas  
Sermon for July 5, 2020 ~ Proper 9A  
The Very Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

What strange words of Jesus, asking people to take his yoke on them ([Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)). We resist the idea of wearing a yoke like a dumb ox. We are Americans. We want to be free. We're celebrating our freedom this very weekend. Now the one who to know is to know true freedom, invites us to wear a yoke. What does it mean?

Ox yokes were made of wood in Jesus' day. The ox was brought into the Carpenter's shop several times to make sure the yoke fit the animal perfectly so as not to gall its neck.

When Jesus says, "My yoke is easy," he means "tailor made for you." When he says, "My burden is light," he means it is not to be more than we can bear. You can be sure if it is, somebody else, perhaps you yourself, is making it that way. There is a lot of self-induced misery in our lives.

But why use such an image? Simply because, to be human is to be yoked. Our lives are a series of connections. Inside ourselves, there is a collection of Saints and sinners. We are dependent upon others who walked beside us in life. There are movements, passions, opportunities, and adventures, which claim our loyalties. To be a human being is inevitably to be yoked to something. So Jesus is saying, "Exchange the yoke that is galling your neck for one which fits." Why, then, is the yoke of Jesus a yoke of freedom?

**This yoke gives us freedom in our relationship to ourselves.**

Many of you will remember Janis Joplin, the singer, who years ago sang a song entitled "Bobby McGee," in which there is a line that has always intrigued me. The line says, "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose." I believe that to be true. Some of the greatest expressions of human Liberty have come only after some soul, knocked to the ground, stripped of everything, recognized that there was nothing left to be lost or taken away in response to some bold action.

Those who arrive at such a place in life and see themselves with earthly eyes only might respond to this nothing-left-to-lose situation by yoking themselves to some negative force or purpose. Having interpreted their situation as a negative judgment on their lives, they might use their newfound sense of freedom to "get even" by giving in to the murderer inside them. The consequences of such antisocial behavior involve the removal of the very freedom that enabled the actions in the first place.

Then, there is another freedom. It too is born of looking at ourselves in all of our poverty. And yet, when we do, instead of finding only a criminal looking for an opportunity to break out, we find a child of God, yearning to be born. We find this child of God because we look at ourselves through the eyes of the Divine Lover of our souls. Then, instead of finding our condition one of condemnation, we find what Saint Paul has called "the glorious Liberty of the children of God." Suddenly, we see our nothing-left-to-lose condition provides a great and wonderful opportunity to yoke ourselves to the victorious Christ and enter a life of creativity and purpose, knowing that this freedom can never be taken away. Having discovered a wonderful person inside who is created in the image of God, we can project that

image on the world around us and succeed in what we're doing. The fear of failure will no longer bind us. Faith in the One who loves us perfectly casts out that fear and we are truly free.

### **The yoke of Jesus gives us freedom in our relationship to others.**

It should be obvious to us that if we have achieved a positive self-image through seeing how much God loves us, we will no longer have to display vicious judgments and project the negative feelings in us onto others. When we stop hating ourselves, we can be free to love and care for others. When we learn to forgive ourselves, we can forgive others. When we learn to recognize the child of God within us, we learn to see others as children of the same God, our brothers and sisters. We began to pray for them and with them. We experience solidarity and understanding and compassion for we have looked into our own lives and faced up to what is hidden inside.

What we now recognize as the impulse to murder in our hearts has broken to the surface in some lives. But now, because we have seen the murderer who lives within us, we can love the murderer too. We are in the words of Job, "Brothers to Dragons."

Yoked with Christ, we can give ourselves to others and freedom. Our love can then be genuine for we expect nothing in return. This has to begin in the Church. The world is watching to see if our gospel of love is true.

### **The yoke of Jesus gives us freedom in our relationship to God.**

Jesus said, "My father has given me all things. No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the son chooses to reveal him." Then, Jesus lets us in on who the Son is, "Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest." The Son is prepared to reveal the Father and give rest to those who are tired or dragging around the baggage of sin and guilt, who are weary or trying to make life work without the divine power it must have, who are burdened by the worry that everything depends on unaided human effort, and all of those who can say, "There's nothing left to lose."

If you are in that place, you are ready to look into the heart of God and discover the freedom that results from seeing not a harsh, murderous, critical parent, but a fountain of love which is ready to go all the way just for you. There is freedom in that. Freedom to live, freedom to sing a new song, freedom to fail, if necessary, in the pursuit of this new life, knowing that the one with whom you are now yoked has already won the victory. You and I can be winners when we live in this kind of freedom yoked with THE Winner.