

July 5, 2020 Pentecost 5A  
Matthew 11:28-29  
The Bearer of Burdens

*In our Gospel lesson, Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."*

Let's talk about burdens and weariness. Let's start right where we are—  
July 5, 2020, Minneapolis metro area.

We celebrated our American independence yesterday. Independence Day was different for me this year. Quite a bit different. It was different because of COVID-19. It was different because of the rioting and violence and looting that went on in our city recently. It was different because of the realization of the injustice that still part of our free, independent nation. It was different because I realized that this event we celebrated with picnics and fireworks all came about as a result of violence and rioting and fires and destruction of other people's property. I'm not talking about the events of last month. I'm talking about the events of 250 years ago, when the white colonists reacted against injustice with violence, and fires and rioting and dumping a boatload of tea that belonged to someone else into the Boston Harbor. The people who won our independence were people of violence and riots and looting.

I say this not to condone or justify the violence of last month. I say it to help understand the violence of last month. The burden of injustice brings with it violence and anger. We saw it in 1776. We see it in 2020.

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."*

It has been a wearying time to be the church lately. The grief over the loss of so many lives to the coronavirus is a hard weight to bear in our families, in our communities, in our nation, in our world, in our churches. The loss of jobs and livelihoods is devastating. The inability to meet face to face, to congregate, to embrace, to comfort, and to console in person is nothing but a loss – a deep, aching loss. The shutting down of so much and the staying inside so long has felt like a long slog with heavy packs.

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Churches have responded well. They've done amazing work livestreaming worship, recording sermons, creating virtual choirs, checking in with people via telephone, leading online Bible studies, and attending zillions of zoom meetings.

And yet, we also hear how wearying all this has been. Learning new technologies is frustrating. We spend hours upon hours recording and uploading a fifteen-minute sermon or a four-minute hymn and wonder how can this be. Online meeting formats seem designed to suck the life out of people, leaving us depleted.

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The pandemic has exposed truths about ourselves that are hard to face. Inequalities in health care. Disparities in educational opportunities. The persistent and pervasive racism in our society.

We scramble to respond, but so often, despite our best intentions, we end up speaking in the terms and acting according to the rules that society sets for us, rather than in accordance with the life and truth that we know in Christ, in the church, in the Gospel, in our traditions, in our faith, in our practices.

It is wearying to confront these truths. It is a burden to feel the need to constantly justify ourselves according to the rules of a game we did not choose. It's hard enough to live out the vision of the kingdom that our Lord gives to us. Blessed are the poor ... blessed are the meek ... blessed are those who mourn ... Now we are expected to show how this way of life is also reasonable, useful, inoffensive. It's tiring playing by somebody else's rules. Especially when we seem to know better and can't help ourselves.

And just as the church is getting used to making the jump into a new way of doing things because of COVID-19, and just as we are getting used to this new front door to the church called "online worship," the murder of

George Floyd revealed a whole new need in our society that God is calling the church to meet. Justice. God's Justice. God using His church to make sure everyone has what He wants them to have.

This is a wearying time for the church. Our Gospel lesson offers genuine comfort to those of us who are weary and carrying heavy burdens. Jesus is the One who takes our burdens. He took our burden of sin and our burden and death and put it on His own shoulders at the cross and replaces our burden with grace and forgiveness and holiness. That's alight burden.

And Jesus continues to bear burdens. But He does it now through the shoulders of His church. Jesus is a burden bearer, so His church is too.

One time when Jesus was admonishing some of the big shots of the church of His day, he told them, *"And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with **burdens** they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."*

The role of the church of Jesus is to be burden bearers, not burden givers.

And by His power and His grace we can do this. We have done this. Look at COVID-19. The church responded. We adjusted. We learned new things. We sacrificed. We helped each other with the burdens. We became Jesus for each other. And that's the way it's supposed to be.

There are burdens all around us—burdens of injustice, burdens of loneliness, burdens of rejection, burdens of economics, burdens of fear. They are endless. As the church of Jesus, we stand with Jesus and say, *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, 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."*