

*Fifth Sunday After Pentecost*  
*July 5, 2020*

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship: *Jesus Loves Me v.3 (UMH-191)*

Jesus loves me still today,  
walking with me on my way,  
wanting as a friend to give  
light and love to all who live.

Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!  
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

Centering Words:

“Come to me...and I will give you rest,” Jesus promises. Where do we go, and to whom do we turn, to discover the truth of these words. (*The Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 147*)

Affirmation of Faith: Apostle’s Creed

Prayer of the Day:

Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee. In comparison with this big world, the human heart is only a small thing. Though the world is so large, it is utterly unable to satisfy this tiny heart. The ever-growing soul and its capacity can be satisfied only in the infinite God. As water is restless until it reaches its level, so the soul has not found peace until it rests in God. Let us find this rest through the one who gives us rest, Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray: (*UMH, 423*)

The Lord’s Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word  
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading      Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67

Psalm 45:10-17

Epistle Reading              Romans 7:15-25a

Special Music

Gospel Reading                      Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Sermon                                      *How Is It with Your Soul?*

Hymn                                      *It Is Well with My Soul (UMH, 377)*

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
when sorrows like sea billows roll;  
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

It is well with my soul,  
it is well, it is well with my soul.

2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
let this blest assurance control,  
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

(Refrain)

3. My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

(Refrain)

4. And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
even so, it is well with my soul.

(Refrain)

Benediction:

Go forth, as people renewed by the love of God. Go forth, to renew others with this very love. Amen (from *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2020, 150*)

Response                                      *God Be With You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)*

God be with you till we meet again;  
by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you;  
God be with you till we meet again.

How Is It with Your Soul?

7/5/2020

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30

How is it with your soul? In the early Methodist classes this was the first question that the leader would ask each member. How is it with your soul? It is a question that goes much deeper than just the usual, “How are you doing?” or “How are you feeling?” Instead of just surface emotional or physical feelings, it asks how is it with your essence, your very being. Is your being restless, at peace, agitated, joyful?

How is it with your soul? Many of you may well say, right now, weary. We are weary of this virus. We are weary of hearing of the mounting numbers of cases and the number of deaths. We are weary that many of the activities we enjoyed- eating out, going to movies, dancing, going to concerts, going shopping (retail therapy,) having parties, even church- are now high-risk activities that increase the transmission of this virus. We are weary of this virus.

We are weary of the unrest and division in our country. We are weary of the polarization of people along so many different lines- race, political affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, religion. Don't you just want to scream, “why can't we just get along!” We are weary of unrest and division.

We are weary. We are burdened. We feel a heavy yoke upon us. I was recently watching a television program about Lyndon Johnson. Early in his career as a young congressman Johnson went to a small community in the hill country of Texas. In this community all the women were stooped over by the time they were 35. They were stooped from carrying buckets of water on a yoke for several miles from the nearest water supply to their homes. Even though each successive generation of women swore they would not be stooped like their mothers, they all were stooped like their mothers from carrying water.

We may be weary and stooped from carrying burdens, even those essential things like water, a job, caring for family. Even in “normal” times we may be burdened, carrying yokes.

We may carry the yoke of self-centeredness. We focus on what I want. What I need. What are my rights. We don't see the wants, needs and rights of others. We become cold and lose our sense of compassion. We may become so focused on

taking care of ourselves that we fail to let others give us support. We may become like Scrooge, with no one who really cares about us. We carry the yoke of me and nobody else.

We may carry the yoke of shame. We are ashamed of our past, things that we don't want people to know about because of what they will think. We may be ashamed of who we are, particularly when who we are doesn't fit in the "normal" of society. We carry the yoke of feeling condemned by our past or who we are.

We may carry the yoke of hurt and anger, holding onto old hurts and resentments, holding onto anger that prevents us from reconciling relationships. We carry the yoke of hurts so we may hurt the one who hurt us.

We may carry the yoke of comparison, comparing ourselves to others. Coveting what others have, what others do, what others are. We validate ourselves according to others, placing the yoke of "keeping up with the Jones'" upon us.

We may carry the yoke of perfection. We always have to get everything right, and to make a mistake is disastrous. I had one client that came in beating himself up terribly because he made a mistake while pouring concrete for a walkway. I asked him if he had ever poured a concrete walkway before. His answer was no, so I asked how he could you expect to do something he had never done before perfectly. We carry the yoke of having to be perfect and never making a mistake.

We may carry the yoke of production. Feeling that we always have to be busy, always being productive. Never letting ourselves rest. We carry the yoke of production.

We may carry so many different yokes. So much that we become emotionally and spiritually stooped like those women in the Texas hill country.

In Jesus' time the Pharisees maintained and taught strict adherence to Torah, both the Levitical Laws and their interpretation of the Torah. They believed that all people, including lay people, were holy and therefore subject to all the Torah, even that which was intended for only the priests. This placed an undue burden on the common people to try to remember and maintain each of these laws. In his book, *A Year of Living Biblically*, A. J. Jacobs attempted to live according to strict adherence to literal Biblical law. He found that basically it can't be done. This was the same type of near impossibility the Pharisees were placing on the

people. They were making the Torah, God's instructions, a yoke, a burden, upon the people.

Jesus tells all who labor and are heavy laden to come to him. Come to him and he will give you rest for your souls. Jesus says that he will take the heavy yoke of the law from the people of his day. Jesus says to us he will take our yokes from us. The yoke of production, perfectionism, comparison, hurt and anger, and self-centeredness, we can give to Jesus. We can be free of the burdensome yokes that we often place upon ourselves.

Does this mean that we are yoke free? No, Jesus says that we are to take his yoke upon us. Wait a minute! Wouldn't that just be trading one yoke, one burden, for another?

What Jesus was saying to the people of his day was that he would take away the yoke, the burden of the law that the Pharisees were placing on them, and replace it with a different yoke. He would give a yoke that is easy and light, rather than heavy and burdensome. We would learn that yoke from Jesus.

The women of that community in the Texas hill country still needed water. Likewise, we still need God's teaching, God's law. But the women of that community are no longer stooped, for one of the first projects that LBJ passed through was a water system for that community. Now rather than carrying buckets of water on a yoke, the women could get water by turning a tap.

The yoke that Jesus places upon us is the law, not the letter of the law to be kept with ever tittle and jot, but the basic core of the law, to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; and to love our neighbor as our self.

We are to carry the yoke of loving ourselves. Not in a selfish way, but learning to value ourselves not by how much we produce, not in comparison to others, not by what we may or may not have done in the past, and not by relying on our own devices. We value ourselves by how much we are loved by God. We rely on God's guidance and direction, taking off that burden of figuring it out for ourselves and trusting God. That seems pretty easy and light.

We are to carry the yoke of loving others. Letting go of our jealousies, fears, prejudices, judgments, hurts and angers, freeing us to love others; to see and value them, not as humans see and value them, but how God sees and values

them. Freeing us to love and be loved by others and to build a community centered around love and not opinions or perceptions. That is a much easier yoke.

We carry the yoke of loving God, who loves us and created us from love to give love. We rely on God. We depend on God, knowing that God works all things for good. We rely on God to get us through this pandemic. We rely on God to heal that which divides people. We rely on God who carries our burdens with us.

You see, often two oxen would be yoked together to make the job easier and to make it possible to carry a much heavier load. So, Jesus is saying take off your single yoke and attach yourself with me to this double yoke and we will carry this burden together.

When we give up our yoke, our burdens, to Jesus, living by the law to love God, love others, and love ourselves, our burdens are much lighter for Jesus carries them with us. Then we can say, it is well with my soul.