July 9, 2023 **CHOSEN JOURNEYS**

Our gospel reading for this Sunday contains one of the most familiar passages in the Bible. Most of us probably know this verse in one of the old translations. Matthew11:28 "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" For centuries this passage has been used for comforting the grieving, encouraging the struggling, and giving hope when all else seems to have failed. We read this verse; we underline it; we sometimes memorize these verses. We trust these words when nothing else around us seems trustworthy.

"Come unto me." It is a wonderful invitation from our Lord himself. It is not only an invitation; it is also a promise: "You will find rest for your souls; my yoke is easy."  The words themselves can ease our situation and enliven our hope. The danger in this is that if we do not know their setting, we may misappropriate them and take them to mean things that Jesus could not have meant or - worse -- we may not see where they really do apply most profoundly. Clearly, Jesus couldn't have meant that in this life, all our weariness and burdens of work, poor health, poverty, and all other problems will disappear.

One day all our burdens will be lifted, but here Jesus is not speaking primarily of eternal life in heaven. He is speaking to his followers during their participation in his mission. "Come to me now and I will give you rest now. Take my yoke upon you." What is this rest? What is this **"yoke"** of Christ's that we are to take upon us, a yoke is that easy? Our responsibility is where we need to see the setting in which these familiar words were spoken.

Jesus himself is discouraged and even angry, as we see from the earlier parts of chapter 11. Even John the Baptist seems not to have understood what was happening. Jesus says in verse 20 “the cities in which most of his deeds of power have been done, because they did not repent." The Israelite cities were refusing his deeds and his message, while if such deeds had been done in pagan cities (even in Sodom!) they would have repented, Jesus says.

Jesus in his disappointment and rage, what does Jesus do? Here is where our gospel passage starts. It is a prayer. Okay, that's not so hard to understand. But it's a prayer of thanks, of all things. In verse 25 "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants.” Jesus may be disappointed and angry, but he is not discouraged by an unresponsive world because he trusts in the Father's sovereignty over all creation. "Thank you, Father; you've hidden the gospel from the wise and well-educated and revealed it only to the little ones, for such was your gracious will." What's Jesus talking about? What are "these things" that are hidden from the wise.

Jesus is talking about God's radical focusing of the divine word and work in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. That's what the wise and the learned back then and in every age have such difficulty seeing. And let's not exclude ourselves. Aren't we also offended or at least puzzled by what Jesus goes on to say next? In verse 27 Jesus declares "All things [absolutely everything] have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one [really] knows the Son except the Father, and no one [really] knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

The point is not just the obvious one that God's ways are not our ways and that God in some sense is always unknown to mere humans. Of course, there is some truth in that, but it's not the truth of which Jesus is speaking here. If you like to learn more on what Jesus is talking about please join us in our worship on Sunday at 11: AM.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister