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~ Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 ~

Rev. Matthew Senf

**Assistant to the Bishop, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
British Columbia Synod**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew

Jesus said, "To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 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."

There is a good story told about Dr. Samuel Johnson, the great English, literary master, who, upon completion of his exhaustive lexicon, *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755, received various delegations of London's intellectual elite to congratulate him on his 8-year opus. Among those delegations was a group of, what may have been described then as London's most respected and respectable women. These fine, upstanding ladies had presented themselves in Dr. Johnson's parlour on Fleet Street to say to him "Dr., we congratulate you on your decision to exclude all indecent words from your dictionary", to which the good Dr. replied "Well ladies, I congratulate you on your persistence in looking them up."

The moral of the tale is one that must surely be obvious to anyone with any sense, there is little hope for those who insist on balancing their ladder precariously atop the cistern of their own toilet such that they might look over into their neighbour's bathroom window only to be offended by what they see there

John came as an ascetic and you called him a Heretic

Jesus came eating and drinking and you called him a glutton

If you are offended by everything God sends you, how will you ever come to know the truth about God?

Let us pray

O Lord send your Holy Spirit to bring us to truth

For if you are with us then nothing else matters

And if you are not with us...

Then nothing else matters

Amen.

At this point, not quite halfway through Matthew's gospel, we get the real sense that Jesus is flagging. His strength and His patience...both with the religious folk that keep showing up to throw shade on him and His own disciples who often seem so impossibly thick that we, the modern reader, can miss the fact that they are meant to seem like that for the benefit of our own learning... is running out

Jesus begins to talk about the laying down of burdens with an exhaustion that we can almost feel through the words on the page. He speaks, the Lord of Hosts does, about the weight of hardship and about rest for the soul...with a palpable longing

He knows—he must know—with His face already set toward Jerusalem— that He will be called upon to heave up onto His shoulders one more impossible yolk before He is ultimately able to lay His own burden down and finally receive that *rest unto His soul* that He so desperately wants for us...and this is, I think, what is pushing Him...

There is a desperation, a frustrated and unfulfilled eagerness to get us, by way of the disciples, to clearly understand what God is doing for us in Him...

And yet, in ways metaphorical, and allegorical, and all too actual... we sit in the marketplace chirping out to one another as if we cannot hear it clearly, or have trouble believing it, or are just too offended by it...this thing that Jesus wants us so desperately to know

The apostle Paul is not offended by it though, he seems to hear it quite clearly and, in fact credits it for the rescue of nothing less than his whole self

Today, in his letter to the Romans, we witness the same soul breaking despair ...

... I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...

... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...

Who will rescue me from this body of death?

There's a burden that most of us know the weight of ...don't we?
that burden of fracture, of the willfulness to choose that which leads away from life, that,
old as creation, burden... sin

But even as I use the very word...are you not offended?

I can barely get it out of my mouth before we are already rallying and mustering, are we
not, all the powers of our reason, our moral and ethical indignation, our modern and
emancipated sensibilities

"How dare we be accused of wrongdoing predicated on old, outdated, irrelevant beliefs..."

And we relativize and we ridicule, and we try like hell to maintain our righteous indignation
...and yet that fracture, that offending and offensive **truth** will not leave us in peace.

We drag it around with us like a rotting albatross tied to our leg, shackled around our necks
like a...like a...well, like a **yolk**. A hard, and heavy, and chaffing yolk which is shaped like, and
feels like and stinks like judgement...Judgement which is the only offspring of the **law**...the
law, which can only ever indict, it can only ever accuse and point the finger, it can only ever
call us to account and to be judged

And that, to us, is insufferably offensive!

This thing, this law, this insupportable yolk does not **correct**, it does not sustainably **deter**...
it only **accuses**, and in doing so, after all our vain attempts to mitigate it and abrogate it
and, reason it away... it only and ultimately always brings despair

Luther preached fiercely that the most noble work of the **law** was to **drive** this very despair
...I used to preach that fiercely as well and although now I still very much believe it, I do not
preach it with fierceness, nor with zeal or passion but rather with trembling, bone weary
fatigue, with resignation and a recoiling from the pain that the truth of it inevitably causes.
It is with the regret and the sorrow and the disappointment of 54 years of missing the mark
so extremely that I accept unequivocally that the preaching of repentance from sin must
endure for as long as we, the Church, endure...

When I say this, does it sound like me calling out across a marketplace to you?

When I call you to repentance, are you offended?

The hardest thing for the preacher of law and gospel must surely be to get the measure of
each right.

I know that among the many of you that are listening to this across this whole of this great
country...more indictment, more accusation, more judgement is hardly necessary to bring
despair, despair is alive and well and, despite the preaching of the gospel everywhere...
growing

The world, this Church, we ourselves groan under the weight of it. It robs us of any lasting
joy, of any meaningful peace, even, ironically, of any possible justice

Which is why for the preacher in me, there is a surprising and surpassing joy in what comes next, in what must always come next...

After the law has done its awful work

After we have been battered to despair by the law and a world so quick and keen to judge...

There comes a Savior who, although He certainly has the right, perhaps the only lasting right, to indict and to accuse and to be offended, instead offers

Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest unto your souls

The optional lectionary reading in place of the Psalm today is taken from the Song of Songs...

In it the Beloved comes to us leaping over the hills like a gazelle, excited and anxious just to behold us through the window and through the lattice, US... His own beloved! And then to say,

"Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone... the time of singing has come"

Arise my love, my fair one and come away, come away from all that brokenness and fracture, from all that self-loathing and all that offense, come away from all those pointed fingers and all that guilt

For your God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, your God will not always accuse but will redeem you, **redeem** and rescue all of you, into a grace fashioned for you from the foundation of the world.

Baruch Hashem