

**Fourth Sunday after Trinity**  
**July 9, 2017, Year A, Proper 9**  
**St. Dunstan's Anglican Church, Largo, FL**

Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67  
Psalm 45:10-17  
Romans 7:15-25a  
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, ... and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

A yoke is a heavy wooden harness that fits over the shoulders of an ox or oxen. It is attached to a piece of equipment like a plow or a wagon that the oxen are to pull. Jesus used this simple agricultural example to illustrate the point that many of us carry heavy burdens as well. We are tied to them in such a way that there seems to be no way to get out from under their burden.

A person may be carrying heavy burdens of sin, excessive demands from religious leaders, oppression and persecution, or weariness in the search of God. This list of burdens may seem a bit odd at first, especially in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. So let's look at this some more to better understand what is going on in the spiritual world as we attempt to live our lives to the fullest in our physical lives.

The burden of sin is obvious to us all. We think of addictions, bad behavior, bad thoughts, bad language – all sorts of things that other people do. Why don't they get their acts together like me? But are we willing to shine a light in the dusty corners of our own lives to uncover the anger that we harbor against some other person, the behaviors we wink at and indulge ourselves in because “life's hard, and I deserve it,” the problems we fail to address because we are too busy – and on and on. It's not hard to find sin in our own lives if we look for it, and that's a burden if we are not striving to be more Christ-like in our behavior.

The burden of “excessive demands from religious leaders” sounds like something out of the New Testament that was true 2,000 years ago. Do we observe the necessary traditions and customs of the Church like fish on Fridays during Lent because we have to or because we want to? Are we following a set of rules set up for us by religious leaders like going to worship every Sunday, or do we look forward to Sunday to gather together to worship an amazing God? There are fine lines of distinction here, aren't there? And which side we find ourselves on depends on our understanding of God and what we are doing to serve him.

The burdens of oppression and persecution may seem to be problems found in the developing world or countries where governments oppose Christianity, and that is certainly true. But what about right here at home? Why can't we pray in public schools? Why does political correctness say that we cannot talk about our religion in public places? We carry the burden of

these things with us all the time. They keep us from expressing our faith when we should be shouting it from the rooftops. Over time, they become accepted as normal and represent a significant burden.

The burden of weariness from seeking God may seem odd. But some of us continue to work too hard to try to be a good Christian because we don't understand. There is a very fine line between accepting Christ but continuing to work just to remain acceptable and continuing to work to live a more Christ-centered life. Working hard is not the issue. Understanding why we work is the key, and it is a burden if we are working to be accepted rather than blessed.

Jesus frees people from all these burdens. He says he will give us rest, and the rest Jesus promises is love, healing and peace with God. He does not promise the end of all labor, but instead a true relationship with God changes meaningless, wearisome toil into spiritual productivity and purpose.

Jesus said that his yoke is light. We are still under authority, and we still have work to do. But Jesus' yoke remains easy compared to the crushing alternative. His yoke is easy because it is a shared yoke. Jesus died for our sins so we wouldn't have to. As we work through the issues of life in service to God, we do so with the certain hope of an eternal and glorious future with him. We toil now for an absolutely certain reward that is guaranteed without regard to the quality or quantity of our work. Our work is therefore not a burden of hopeless toil but a blessing of service offered to God himself.

Paul addresses this in our New Testament reading this morning in his see-saw battle in dealing with sin. He wrote, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." There is often a tug of war going on in our minds, isn't there? I know what is right, but I do something else.

Paul points out three things here. First, knowing the law is not enough to prevent us from breaking it. Anybody ever drive faster than the posted speed limit? Second, self-determination doesn't solve the problem. No matter how hard we try, there eventually is a situation where we feel obligated to drive just a little faster. And third, becoming or having become a Christian doesn't stamp out all sin and temptation from a person's life.

So then we realize that while being saved (or born again or giving our lives over to Christ) takes only a moment of faith, becoming like Christ is a lifelong process. Paul likens Christian growth to running a race in some of his other letters, emphasizing that no one in the world is innocent, whether a pagan who doesn't know God's laws or a person who knows them and tries to keep them by working harder.

The reality then is that we all must depend totally on the work of Christ alone for our salvation. We cannot earn it by our good behavior. Jesus said, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We have an incredible blessing from God that can make living so much more enjoyable and less painful if we listen, learn and accept God's way of living as offered to us by and through Jesus. And we have an incredible gift to pass on to others.

“So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

And now unto you, O Lord, be ascribed all might, majesty, power and dominion. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.