

July 3, 2011

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 (read from *The Message*)

What does it mean to be yoked with Christ? I mean, what does that really look like for you?

There's an old story about a little boy who was out helping his dad with the yard work. Dad asked him to pick up the rocks in a certain area of the yard. Dad looked over and saw him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. The little boy struggled and struggled while Dad watched. Finally, the boy gave up and said, "I can't do it." Dad asked, "Did you use all of your strength?" The little boy looked hurt and said, "Yes, sir. I used every ounce of strength I have." The father smiled and said, "No, you didn't. You didn't ask me to help." The father walked over and then the two of them pulled that big rock out of the dirt. (Rev. Billy D. Strayhorn, "Freedom Through the Yoke")

What does it mean to be yoked with Christ? Being yoked with Christ is knowing that we are not alone and that there is someone with us to help us.

Dr. Diane Komp of Harvard Medical School was eating with one of her patients, who had Down's syndrome, at a restaurant. The restaurant had music and a little dance floor. Her friend loved to dance, but Komp had had a hard day and didn't feel up to it. But then the young man found a partner, another Down's Syndrome person by the name of Grace. And they danced, and danced, and the young man was so pleased and excited afterwards. He said to Dr. Komp, "She's amazing Grace; she could dance all night." (Scott H. Bowerman, "Dancing With God.")

What does being yoked to Christ look like? Being yoked with Christ brings God's grace and it can dance all day, all night and forever.

Several years ago I trained with a friend to run my first marathon along the Lake Superior shoreline. We arranged our schedules so that we could run our training runs together. We even talked about running most of Grandma's marathon together. Mile 15. That was going to be the cut-off. If one of us wasn't doing well, the other one would go ahead and leave the other behind. The day of the race arrived. I was to meet Dana Lee at the starting line. Unfortunately, our shuttle pulled in to the starting line just before the race was to begin – there was no way I would find her. The race was delayed a 1/2 hour while we waiting out a passing thunderstorm and I was able to find her. The race started and the miles flew by. Mile 15 came and went and we were still running together. Mile 20 (the furthest we had run in our training). Periodically, we would turn to each other to see how we were doing and if one of us needed to break away, but it never happened. Mile 21. Mile 22 – Lemon drop hill – I was ready to stop and walk, but Dana Lee pushed me up that hill. Mile 23. Mile 24. I was exhausted by this point and couldn't feel my legs, but we were still moving. I think I was only moving b/c someone else was with me. Mile 25. I knew that if I stopped now, I was going to hurt and probably wouldn't get up again. Mile 26. Where is that stupid finish line anyway? And finally, there it is. We cross the finish line, turn to each other and cry because of our exhaustion. I can't believe we did it. We were yoked together in our training and it only became bearable b/c of one another.

Saturday, I had the chance to encourage Corban in his very first race. I ran beside him and encouraged him. I cheered him on and celebrated with him when he crossed the finish line.

What does it look like to be yoked with Christ? Being yoked with Christ is knowing that someone is with us in our life's journey, encouraging us and running the race with us.

A new pastor had just arrived in a new parish when a member told him how in fewer than 2 years, her husband died, her son was incarcerated for drug possession and her daughter committed suicide. The woman was disconsolate, drowning in grief and despairing of her empty, painful future. That's when her pastor dared to say something so bold, so outrageous, that she never forgot it. "Thank God every day," he told her, "even and especially when you can scarcely find a reason to do so." She admitted that there were many days when she couldn't manage to thank God for anything, but she summoned the courage to try, and in time thanks became a daily practice and a source of strength, hope and eventually even joy for her. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!" says the bold, insensitive prophet to a people mired in the desolate aftermath of exile in Zech (9:9-12). (Pastor Brian Hiortdahl in Christian Century magazine)

What does it look like to be yoked with Christ? It could be that we emerge from our prayers with wondrous gifts to share (Hiortdahl). Upon finishing his prayers Jesus emerges with offering the gift of rest for the weary and heavily burdened!

Being yoked with Christ is being able to rejoice greatly even in the midst of the pain and chaos of our lives.

The act of giving thanks is the first step towards the path of freedom and great rejoicing in what God has first given us.

What burdens do you carry in your life? What would it look like to hand them over to Christ and to be yoked with him? What would that mean for you?

It means knowing that you are not alone and that God's presence is with you in grace. It means that sometimes our neighbor reaches out to us in the love of God to remind us that we are not alone. It means that in God through Christ you will find rest for your souls.