

Learning the unforced rhythms of grace

Lord of heaven and earth, whose Son came eating and drinking, exposing the rivalry that tears the world apart: may we share his feast and friendship and lay our burdens in his liberating arms; through Jesus Christ, Wisdom's child.

A Collect for Proper 9A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-15; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

JULY 9, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 11:16-19, 25-30

Jesus said to the crowd, "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."

You may have just heard this gospel reading and thought: "I have no idea what this is about."

We tend to tune out when we think we don't understand something, when we might not get the right answers on a test in a scripture class – or that scripture is something for experts...

But, you do actually understand this gospel reading... you've heard all this before.

Have you ever had a conversation with someone about one religion or another – or one denomination or another – say comparing St. Mark's and the Ranch Church? Or one religious

leader or another? Or been sitting around a campfire with an evangelical Christian and an atheist?

After the avalanche of words – an avalanche that can now cascade at any volume and perpetually thanks to the internet – it seems nothing is clear, nothing worked out, nothing decided, no final answer.

I often refer to the theological libraries – stacks and stacks and stacks of books – and all the words produced by church institutions through centuries... and for what?

It can be overwhelming... paralyzing...

In this particular gospel reading, John the Baptist and Jesus are being compared... like in the car magazines where a Porsche, BMW, and Mercedes are tested side by side – there's a slang term for that kind of article – a "comparo." So in this gospel reading people are doing a comparo of John the Baptist and Jesus – which is like a Ford F-150 pickup and a Tesla – both can be good but in really different ways.

But that isn't what they're saying...

John came wearing camel's hair clothes and a leather belt, eating locusts and wild honey. People called him crazy. Jesus enjoyed his acquaintances and friends – rich and poor.... It doesn't

seem he *required* a certain standard of food and drink but he didn't turn down his invitations.... Remember his first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding – and it was the best wine at the feast, by the way. So people who like to criticize (no one here like that) said he was a lush and a friend of riff-raff (maybe why we get along so well).

But in the war of words – and we're wearier than ever of these – there really aren't any winners... Jesus says: "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Or, in the *Message* translation by Eugene Peterson: "The proof of the pudding is in the eating."

People have always wanted to figure things out... and especially since the Enlightenment, we want everything broken out into black and white, right and wrong, this way not that way....

Now we're in a post-Enlightenment time... and who knows how that's going – or certainly how it's going to turn out...?

But one of the basics (of any era) is we will never figure out God and within God are opposites that never reconcile, like the sun rising on both the evil and the good and rain falling on both the righteous and the unrighteous. Remember Jesus saying to love your enemies?

Things like that... (and there

are a lot of them...)

So then we get to the end of this reading: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Or we can hear it from Peterson’s the *Message*: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

“Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”

That sounds so good – and it also sounds like a challenge to our cultural conditioning – where a lot gets forced and we only trust grace until we get nervous and take over or start berating someone....

In a larger sense, this invitation of Jesus seems to me to be the direction not just for us as individuals – but for St. Mark’s as a faith community and, ultimately, what will come of the institutional church in the 21st century.

Fr. Richard Rohr has been quoting St. Augustine for some time: “The Church consists in the communion of the whole world.” That’s a significant redefining of

“Church” as it moves from idea to expression. God’s grace for everyone.

Fewer words. More action...

...more action that makes sense within the wider community of all people, who are all people of God.

The foundation? Resting in God and learning the unforced rhythms of grace.



ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY
EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL
Los Olivos, California

www.smitv.org