

**BYOB (Bring Your Own Brain)
Celebrating Dependence Day**

July 2 & 3, 2011

A Pentecost 3

Matthew 11:25-30

Well it's 4th of July weekend and no doubt many of you have plans to celebrate, even if it's just to watch the fireworks on T.V.

I love the way Neenah and Menasha celebrate—there really is a hometown-feel to everything.

Tomorrow Night/tonight we have a float in the electric parade. It's called ***Our Savior': a place to bee-long***. Don't forget to shout "Our Savior's" when you see the float go by.

It's a bit ironic that while the country is celebrating our "independence", our Biblical texts this weekend point out our "dependence" on God.

I've been preaching a sermon series this summer entitled BYOB; bring your own brain, based on questions and topics you have suggested.

One woman writes: "*My husband* was unemployed for too long." They prayed and prayed and finally he did get a job but it was not a great job. Retirement is a disappointment, not what they had planned.

Another couple described an exhausting life. One of their 3 children is learning disabled. The Dad wrote that every night, after work, after swimming lessons for the kids, he spends 2 hours with his child doing tutoring and helping with homework, while his wife was working just as hard making dinner, doing laundry and helping their other children and then it's all the bed time business, housework or paying the bills and to bed by 11:30, usually with a file of paperwork next to the bed that needs to be attended to and now grandpa is sick. They told me, "We are exhausted, sometimes too exhausted for church."

Another person asked how God could help her deal with a childhood secret. These are people who know what it means to be weary and heavy laden. And we understand their concerns because each of us has had times in our lives when we were weary and heavy laden.

There are all of the demands of just plain living in a fallen world...

And then there is the burden of not living up to our best expectations of our selves...the awareness that we always fall short. We are sinners and we are not perfect.

Even happy events add stress. I was in a hospital room with first-time parents. They were so excited and so proud but the dad of this 2 day old boy asked in all earnestness, "how am I going to pay for his college?"

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest!"

What a welcome invitation. What good news!

Whether we recognize it or not, we are a people who come to church looking for a sense of relief, a helping hand, a kind word or a way to ease our pain or grief. We come yearning for forgiveness, acceptance and the promise of a better future.

Jesus, was certainly aware of the burdens of the people around him, just as he is concerned about the burdens of those here today. No pain, physical or spiritual, is too small to go unnoticed by our Lord and Savior.

So what can we learn from today's reading from Matthew?

Well, the first of all, as obvious as it may seem, is to recognize that we **are** in need of rest, that we **are** burdened and that help is a gift, not a challenge to our pride.

We need to be careful that our own need for independence doesn't get in the way.

Dr. Daniel E. Fountain, a medical missionary in Africa, tells about a time when the driver of the hospital pick-up truck was driving him to one of their health centers. He noticed an elderly lady struggling along the road carrying a very heavy load of firewood on her head. The driver stopped and offered to take the lady and her firewood to her village. He helped her into the back of the truck and then proceeded on his way. However, when he glanced in the rear-view mirror he was astonished to see this lady sitting in the back of the truck with the load of firewood back on top of her head!

How often do we fail to accept help from others or from God.-Health, the Bible and the

Church (Wheaton, Ill.: Billy Graham Center, 1989), 100-101 or do we lay our burdens down only to pick them up again?

Second, Jesus promises rest...rest but not a life of ease.

The word **rest** is intended to indicate the kind of rest that God took after he created the world...a break, a time out to delight in what **is** real, true and good in our lives rather than what we do not have or what is yet to be accomplished.

It helps renew our energy to return to work.

We call that Sabbath. Sabbath is more than going to church every Sunday. It is intended as a time to be renewed and to reflect, a time to enjoy the gifts God has given us and a time to connect with God and God's people.

Connecting with others is important because, remember, most of the time God works through process and through other people.

If we never stop to rest, we may not have time to recognize the blessings and support already active in our lives.

Then Jesus goes on to say, ***“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.”***

We wish that Jesus had said, **“Lay your burdens down, I’ll do all of the work,”** but instead Jesus’ yoke is to be added to the heavy load that we are already carrying.

Jesus is talking about the yoke of discipleship here.

This is the third insight.

We are to pick up all of the responsibilities of being a faithful Christian.

What’s amazing about that is that this discipleship stuff is not supposed to make our lives harder but easier...because it helps us handle the rest of our lives

Years ago a widow, who struggled with the death of her husband, told me about an image that really helped her.

All along, she had been trying to “get rid of” her grief.

She wanted to get past it, to leave it behind so that she could get on with her life but it never seemed to work, ...until someone told her that her grief would be there forever, because it was a testimony to her love for her husband.

However, God would give her a spiritual “backpack” that would help her carry her grief, and that backpack would mean that sometimes she would hardly notice that the grief was there. For her, that spiritual backpack included her life in the church.

Of course there would be times when she would need to stop, pull out her memories, cry some tears, remember her love...but then she could pack them up again for a while. The grief would always be there but the backpack would help her carry it.

God’s yoke functions a bit like that backpack. Yokes are well designed and often especially shaped for the ox so that he can carry heavy loads. Furthermore, a yoke connects animals in such a way that together they can carry loads that neither one could carry alone.

Take my yoke upon you...my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

If we are yoked to Jesus, then he’s helping us carry the burden. In other words no matter how heavy the load, we are never alone.

A pastor (A.P. Bailey) tells the story of a little boy who heard this passage for the first time. “***My yoke is easy...***” The teacher asked, “***Who can tell me what a yoke is?***” the youngster replied “***something they put on the necks of animals.***”

“***And do you know what is the meaning of God’s yoke?***” the teacher inquired. And the little boy thought for a moment, then said, “***That’s when God puts His arms around our neck!***”

Come to me..., Jesus invites

I will give you rest,

My yoke is easy,

My burden is light.

This is the good news of the gospel.