

Matthew 11: 16-30 for 7-06-08

In the previous three weeks we've heard Jesus' instruction to disciples he was sending into mission. Here we hear his reflections on those who did not respond or did not respond positively. These reflections are anything but calm or generous. It is *not* "okay" with Jesus that people do not respond to the proclamation of God's kingdom. It is a sign of the depths of the blindness and self-centeredness of the world.

Jesus describes the process that led to rejection "in this generation" in several ways. Take a look at verses 16-17, they are like children playing "wedding" or "funeral" and complaining that other children don't play the game they're playing. There are two problems there. First, this generation is simply playing at life, and second, they're so focused on playing what *they* want what *they* want and they can't see or respond to real life when it's right there before them. John came fasting, and they rejected him as a nut case. Jesus came rejoicing, and they call him a glutton.

Jesus has no kind words to say about self-absorbed folks playing at life and condemning others for not playing their game. Instead, he reveals it for what it is. He names the resistance as resistance in a way that shows just how foolish it is.

Look at Verses (20-24). They are even more pointed. Jesus is not all right with people and places that have seen the signs of God's kingdom, but have refused to change their lives. He reproaches the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, saying their

response was worse than that of Tyre and Sidon, Israel's ancient and pagan rival. He reproaches Capernaum, his base of operations in Galilee, telling them they're headed for Hell and a fate worse than Sodom's.

It is a reminder, however, that such speech, even of harsh reproach, is part of Jesus' response, as it had been part of the response of the prophets before him and since. Reproach of cultures that reject God's kingdom may not be "nice" or "politically correct" but it is here, literally, the word of the Lord.

So how do you respond? Do you ignore Him? If so, what does that say about your own defensiveness? What are you holding on to that keeps you from surrendering yourself fully to God's kingdom? Are you thinking, "Preach it, pastor?" If so, is this only because of the hope of the kingdom stirring in you, or are you also out simply to attack others while ignoring the log in your own eye? Perhaps another response a truly open heart might offer is "Yes, Lord" or even, "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner (the Jesus Prayer)."

It is essential that we hear and reflect on how clear, how severe and how divisive Jesus' speech in these verses is if we're going to hear the "verses we like" (28-30) in their fullness. And before we get there, we have one more theological gauntlet to pass through (verses 25-27). Jesus offers a prayer (25-26) in rather a different tone, followed by a brief but unmistakable declaration (27) that sounds more like John's gospel than the synoptics, as a

capstone to the denunciations he has just made and a segue to the invitation that follows.

The prayer: "I acknowledge you with gratitude, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and have revealed them to the smallest of children. Ah yes, Father, for that's what was pleasing in your sight." The prayer is bold. Jesus addresses God not only as Father, but in the second person singular, familiar. The prayer is almost an interjection, and perhaps almost a laugh. It embraces the kinds of reversals Jesus has announced time and again were part of God's kingdom.

The declaration: "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" (Matthew 11:17, NRSV). There is a level of exclusivity of knowledge and relationship here that is not to be ignored. Jesus is declaring himself here to be the pivot point or hinge pin of history, the lens through which to "get to know" God and all things. Miss him and his teaching, and you do not know God or anything else worth knowing. Be blessed to have the Son reveal the Father to you, and then, but only then, you have right understanding.

Note that the choice for the Son to reveal the Father to us is not ours to make. We do not get to decide who "Father" is, nor do we get to decide on what we want to believe about the Son. The Son reveals the Father to those whom the Son decides.

The "verses we like" are perhaps the verses at which those of us in the "First World" may most need to take pause. These verses disclose those to whom the Son decides to reveal himself: the worn-out and the over-burdened. These are the slaves, the poor, the people who live at the margins of "respectable" society, who constantly have to jury-rig their way through each day because the systems for survival that others have access to are not designed to work for them. Indeed, those systems seem to be designed to keep them marginalized, worn-out, and overburdened.

Now look carefully what Jesus offers these people. "Come to me, and I will give you rest" is the usual translation. "I will refresh you" is another. The verb here most literally means "stop again," or "press the pause button" we might say. The Sabbath is the necessary period at the end of a week. We can't just keep going. We all need the full stop. The worn down and over-burdened need it even more.

But the refreshment Jesus offers is not "inner peace" or even a "get-away." What he offers here is instead his teaching. "Take my yoke on you, learn from me. My heart is meek. I understand poverty and distree. Learn from me and your souls will have refreshment. My teaching does not keep you worn out. My teaching does not add to your over-burdened life."

Indeed, we know it does not, especially from these past few weeks of focusing on his teaching and his ministry. God's kingdom has drawn near, and it is for the poor. Jesus heals folks too poor to see a physician. Demoniacs were, or quickly became, among the

poor, and Jesus set them free from their possession. The lepers scraped by, and Jesus cleansed them. Jesus conquers death and raises the dead. This is the One to whom the Father has revealed himself. And this is what he has decided to reveal to the world, as preserved in these Scriptures.

Matthew 11 (The Message)

28-30"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."

Walk with me. We run just to keep up. You walk so fast so far so easily, everywhere and anywhere, with everyone and anyone.

We run just to keep up. Lord, give us energy.

Work with me. We tire just to keep up. You work so much so hard so long, preaching and teaching, healing and raising.

We tire just to keep up. Lord, give us strength.

Watch how I do it. We're bleary just watching you. You never give up, never let go, never hate always forgive.

We're bleary just watching you. Lord, give us vision.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. It's a hard lesson Lord.

We want to earn it, be worthy of it, achieve it. We distrust what is free and unmerited.

Forgive us and grant us grace.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. It's a hard lesson Lord.

We don't know what to do with grace; afraid of what it means unsure of how it changes us. We prefer merits and rewards.

Forgive us and grant us grace.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. It's a hard lesson Lord.

Teach us. Teach us to open our lives to grace. Teach us to open our hearts to love. Teach us to open our arms to help. Teach us to open our eyes to glory.

Forgive us and grant us grace.

Grace to walk with you and work with you.

Grace to live with you and love with you.

Grace to heal and raise with you, teach and preach with you.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. It's a hard lesson Lord.
Forgive us and grant us grace.

Amen.