

**Fourteenth Sunday of the Year: July 5th, 2020:
COME TO ME ALL YOU WHO LABOR.....**

After reading the casualty list every fifth of July morning, one learns that we have killed more people celebrating our independence than we lost fighting for it. (Will Rogers)

Some of you may have heard this true story. It was at a graduation ceremony at the University of Maryland a few years ago. The graduates marched in with great solemnity. Parents were smiling and brushing away tears at the same time. The speakers appropriately stayed within the guidelines of political correctness and no one dared ask for divine blessings on the graduates or their families. The final speaker, one of the students, went to the podium, he stood there silently for a few moments then, without a cue, every one of the graduates sneezed. The student at the podium looked at the audience and said, "**God bless you, each and every one of you.**" **And he walked off the stage. The audience exploded into applause.**

So, on this holiday weekend, I say God bless each and every one of you. We know our country is not perfect, nor are all its politicians, but it's the best country on the face of the earth. Just the fact that we are here today is one indication of that. In some countries our lives would be threatened or we would be put in jail just for coming here or any indication that we are criticizing leaders! Let us continue to work and pray that we might remain strong, able to stand on our own, and remain free — not to do just anything we feel like, *but free to serve God and to serve each other in love.*

Today, as our world continues to become ravaged by COVID-19, people are feeling anxious, impatient, frustrated, and critical. We are less busy with the things that normally hold our attention. We are bored with staying inside, refraining from seeing the people we love and doing the activities that animate us. **We are sick and tired of being “sick and tired!”**

The more cooped up we feel, the angrier we get. And our often kind and calm demeanor is turning testier and more critical. As humans, when our surroundings and our world is rocked, when we feel we have lost control of our decisions and our lives, we react in different ways. Some become depressed and feel helpless. Others become angry and critical.

Into this kind of world came Jesus. In our scripture for today in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes a “generation” that is never satisfied, that is hyper-critical, that is aggressively judgmental, that wants things to go the way they want and people to react the way they expect, according to their own personal preferences and standards. When things don't pan out the way they want, they become angry and spiteful, discontent, contrary, perverse, ornery, impossible to please.

They want people around them to “dance to the tune they play” – to decide how others around them should behave and live. Or sometimes, they have no rhyme or reason to their critique at all, except that they want to express their distaste and dissatisfaction at anything and everyone around them. This kind of “ornery”(**stubborn**) behavior is not based in reason but simply in the desire to disagree – with anything or anyone other than themselves just because they feel a frustration inside they cannot appease. Jesus directs this critique to those gathered to hear him speak, both to strangers and disciples alike.

The Scribes and Pharisees lived a privileged existence. They had no understanding of what life was like for the ordinary people. With their emphasis on the exact observance of the Law, and their multiplication of rules and regulations, they placed an impossible burden on the people. They had little sympathy for those who found this burden too much to bear.

During the years he spent at Nazareth, Jesus lived among the ordinary people. For many of those years he lived the life of a working man. He knew at first-hand the struggles, difficulties and frustrations ordinary people had to endure. He was aware of the heavy burdens, life placed on their shoulders.

Consequently, he felt for the *ordinary people* {“*the Little ones*”} and wanted to lighten their burdens. People came to him from all quarters with their burdens of sickness and misery. All of them had their burdens lightened as a result of meeting him. **His mere presence could bring peace to an anguished soul.**

In times of unrest, frustration, and anger, we need Jesus more than ever. ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.”***

For as all of you know, that “ornery,” contrary feeling that turns our pleasant personalities into perversities when we feel dissatisfied, bored, frustrated, or shut in is a symptom of an unrestful spirit inside. Jesus knows how to read people. He knows how to understand our culture and the ways that people behave. And he knows that an unhappy spirit makes for judgmental and often unsuccessful, even harmful critic. But Jesus’ answer is not just to give advice or admonishment or wag fingers in our direction. For Jesus is the Master of the Art of Critique.

Instead, Jesus offers us a “yoke.” He offers to take the lead and bear the brunt of everyone’s frustration, anger, difficulty, and struggle. He offers us a rest from our internal conflict, and peace from our anger, a break from our never-ending frustration, a reprieve from our helplessness. Jesus offers to fight the fight with us, to give us back control over our lives by allowing us to glide in his powerful, safe, protective shelter.

It doesn’t mean we give up the fight, but Jesus asks us to trust him, to open up to him, to let him guide us in our efforts, so that we too can learn the relational art of critique, the kind that leads to change and healing, peace and humanity.

Jesus came not just to tell people what to do and how to live, but how to feel peaceful in spirit and loving in heart. For the artful heart is also a peaceful and positive heart, a content and stable heart. The Christian Art of Critique not something we can learn to “do” by following another rule or inhaling more wisdom, but by following Jesus. It’s simply allowing Jesus to take the reins and steer our lives, to come into our hearts and turn our stormy and conflicted dispositions into a pool of still waters.

Regarding his own burden he said, ‘**My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**’ How could he, who took on himself the burdens of so many, say that? Because he carried his burden with love. Only love can make a heavy burden seem light. A woman who is deprived of food for a day can barely last out till the end of it. But a mother who gives up food for a day so that her children may have something to eat, hardly notices it.

If Jesus placed any burden on us at all, it was that of loving one another. But if we have love, that is no burden at all. **He doesn't take our burdens from us but gives us the strength to carry them.** While faith makes all things possible, love makes all things easy.