

Message – “A Way To Be Good Again”
Scripture Readings – Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
Saturday, July 8, 2017
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Our first Scripture reading is Matthew 11:16-19. This is a parable about children who cannot agree on the games they play. The children are compared with those who refuse to respond to John, the Baptist, or Jesus. Hear now the Word of God.

16 “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,¹⁷ ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹ 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.”^[a]

Our second scripture reading is Matthew 11: 25-30. Here Jesus expresses gratitude for the ones who do respond to the kind and gentle God Jesus reveals. Jesus offers a new way to those who are overburdened and weary of the religiosity of their day.

25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank^[a] 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; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.^[b] ²⁷ 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.²⁸ “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Title of the Meditation: “A Way To Be Good Again”

Text: Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest unto your souls.” Matthew 11:29

Let us pray. Gracious God, thank you for teaching us your kind and gentle ways and for helping us find our way home to you. As we reflect together, may the words of my mouth and the meditations and thoughts of each of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Ellis Island in New York City’s harbor was a place of hope and a place of tears for hundreds of thousands of immigrants as they passed by the Statue of Liberty into the United States of America from 1892 to 1954. The men, women and children who chose to cross the Atlantic on the second and third class of large ships were “weary and carrying heavy burdens” by the time they arrived. Often they were escaping oppression, religious discrimination and poverty, hoping the American dream would become their reality, if they survived the two to three week ordeal of the trip over and if they were healthy enough to pass the medical examination they received upon arrival. Those who didn’t were sent back on the ship that brought them.

Our son Paul and I had the opportunity to visit this poignant, historical landmark when Paul was 10 years old. To my delight and surprise in the archives we were able to find the manifest of my dad's Italian mother, Josephine Chiaberto, who took the journey in 1911 at the age of four with her parent's Ambrozina and Francisco Chiaberto. We also found the manifest of my mother's Dutch grandmother, Wilhymyna Schaap, who took the journey in 1904 at the age of eighteen, alone.

As I walked with Paul through the same building that was a bridge for my grandmother and great grandparents to American... And as I read the stories of so many remarkable and ordinary people, I felt a strong sense of kinship with this place and those who risked so much to live in the land we celebrated this week. The faces in the photos revealed people of different races, languages, religions and cultures, and yet our human story of love, honor, determination and regret are reflected in all their eyes. I longed to know about the intimacies and choices of their lives.

That same summer I was given a rare glimpse into the intimacies and choices of an immigrant boy who grew up in Afghanistan and came to America when the Russians invaded in the 1980's. The Kite Runner is a novel written by an Afghan immigrant and physician, Khaled Hosseini.

Besides being a deeply personal tale about how childhood choices affect our adult lives, The Kite Runner provides a vivid glimpse of life in Afghanistan over the past quarter century. A country that, until a sad September day in 2001, had too long been ignored or misunderstood.

The friendship between Amir, a privileged Afghan boy and Hassan, the son of his father's servant is the thread that ties the book together. The fragility of this relationship, symbolized by the kites the boys fly together, is tested as they watch their old way of life disappear with the personal and political events that unfold beyond their control. The author's description of pre-revolutionary Afghanistan is rich in warmth and humor but also honest about the tension and prejudice between the nation's ethnic groups and the struggle of an immigrant family to find a way in America after losing the country they knew and loved, first to Russia and then to religious fundamentalism in the Taliban. (Selected quotes from reviews of The Kite Runner.)

This is a story about love, honor, determination and regret. This is a story about shame and keeping secrets and this is a story about redemption...about *a way to be good again*.

Amir, a young man on the other side of the world is given the gift to revisit the choices and circumstances of his childhood in the country that once was his home. Choices and circumstances that cannot be changed and yet, that have changed and colored his life. Because he has the courage to confront the secrets of his past (the secrets he kept and the secrets others kept from him)... And because this time, instead of running he comes face to face with his shame and the shame of those he loved, he is given the opportunity to forgive himself and them and to make new choices that define the color of his future... He is given the opportunity to come home within himself, to find rest, redemption and *a way to be good again*.

Come unto 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 unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-29

When Jesus spoke these words two thousand years ago, he was extending an invitation to people of all walks of life. Jesus knew there were many like the children in the parable, who

would refuse to join in the dance of life, who would refuse a yoke that would lighten their load. Jesus also knew that the rules and regulations of religion (the expectation *to be good* when we know we are not from people who try to appear to be good) add to that burden rather than lighten it, a truth that cuts across all religion.

Jesus doesn't offer to take the burdens we carry from us. They are a part of who we are. They are the choices and intimacies of the journey of our lives, they are the circumstances beyond our control, and they are the choices we make every day, which define who we are and who we will become.

The yoke Jesus offers is easy because it is kind. It is a gift from One who is gentle and humble in heart. A good yoke is one that fits well. Because the One who gives this yoke knows the One who created us and who understands all the choices and intimacies of our hearts, it will fit us well. Jesus' yoke will be kind to our shoulders, enabling us to carry the load more easily, and empowering us to put down the burdens we no longer need to carry. Jesus does not diminish the weight of our accountability to God or one another but helps us to bear this responsibility with wisdom and grace. Jesus offers us *a way to be good again*.

As we come to the table that nourishes and sustains us for the journey, hear these words from the prophet Jeremiah. *Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. (Jeremiah 6:16)* May it be so. Amen.