

Sermon: Are We There Yet?

Scripture: Zechariah 9:9-12; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Sunday, July 9, 2023

Communion Sunday

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Christian Ko Choi

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Springfield, Illinois

Today's Old Testament Scripture reading comes from Zechariah 9:9-12. Written by the minor prophet Zechariah, who's name means, "God Remembered," shares his vision or oracles throughout his book. Starting chapter 9, another vision is being told, regarding the time of the coming of the Messiah. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

Zechariah 9:9-12

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!

Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you;

triumphant and victorious is he,

humble and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

<sup>10</sup> He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim

and the war horse from Jerusalem;

and the battle bow shall be cut off,

and he shall command peace to the nations;

his dominion shall be from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

<sup>12</sup> Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;

today I declare that I will restore to you double. Amen.

Our New Testament Scripture reading is from Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30, where Jesus is referring to the generation of his time who cannot recognize the truth that is right front of them. Therefore, Jesus shares the truth that is not readily apparent in order that people would know him and to know God. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

<sup>16</sup> “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

<sup>17</sup> ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

<sup>18</sup> “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup> 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.”

<sup>25</sup> 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; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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Let us pray. Holy and Loving God, we thank you for this day you have made for us rejoice and to be glad in it. Thank you for meeting us where we are and walking with us every step of the way. As we trust your promises of tomorrow, may we not wait idly but follow you actively, to glean from your daily grace and mercy you pour upon us. May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

During our summertime, we do a lot of traveling. Many of our friends and family are traveling. Just on last weekend alone, 50 million Americans were expected to travel 50 miles or more, of which 43.2 million people drove. Our youth mission trip team from Wichita, Kansas is driving on their way to Chicago to assist an inner-city ministry. Our youth came back last weekend from serving the people of Selma, Alabama last weekend. What a joy it is to travel in a group to bring the good news of hope and love of Christ!

I wish all traveling experiences were that positive. Yet, traveling has its joys and its challenges. One of the joys of traveling these days with my son, Zachariah, whom God remembers, who lets you know that he is 4 and a *half*, starts to ask the question, "Are we there yet" as soon as I close his door.

Yet if the second most spent time as a family outside the home is in our cars, and children and youth learn more from our actions and then what we tell them, how are we demonstrating Christ's love to those who are closest and dearest and nearest in our journeys?

This morning, we are asked through the Scriptures to take the perspective of God's children, whom God remembers each and every one of us by name, to recall God's demonstration of tender loving care in our lives and ask the introspective question, 'Are we there yet' in our spiritual maturity to take upon the yoke of Christ and faithfully carry out the work of ministry in our daily lives.

Matthew chapter 11 starts out with these following words.

*Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.<sup>1</sup>*

Years of learning through books, discussing potential scenarios, and discerning why and how one does ministry was taught to the disciples has been complete. Yet, now, it was the practicum, just like the years of residency for our medical students in medical school. It was in the cities of the disciples, people whom they knew, people whom they cared, people who are their extended family members whom Christ was teaching to along with his fellow residents. Jesus was asking the disciples, 'Are we there yet,' or more specifically, 'are you there yet' to love these people who are the closest and dearest and nearest to you? Are we ready and open to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts? Are we willing to let go of our reservations and embrace the transformative power of Christ's love ourselves first? Because when we are living out our calling, when we are doing missions near and far, when we are doing the practical things of sharing Christ's love, we will be stretched, we will experience what it means to put on the yoke of Christ and come to a fork in our spiritual journey once again, asking us, and God's Spirit tugging us, 'are we willingly surrender control back to Christ this very moment?'

I did not grow up on the farm, but I sure have learned to appreciate and have deepest respect for what our farmers do for the rest of us. The hard work of using the latest technology with self-driving tractors, GPS equipment, using drones to plant their seeds, to understand the details of chemistry in their soils to make the crops grow. Yet, when you ask a farmer how things are in their farms and the week was, they don't talk about all that vast knowledge. They simply say, we need your prayers for rain. We need harvesters to help pick corn so these corns can go to food pantries to feed more people. Their love for

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:1

the wellbeing of people whom they have not met yet – which we know them as friends in this community – is lived out every day in their lives. Now, they would know what it would mean to take upon a yoke to do the work for the day, and I cannot imagine Avery Pound or Harold Hale to say, ‘it is going to be an easy day today folks!’

There is going to be a labor. It is going to be hard work to put on the yoke, to do God’s ministry. And the burden of changing and transforming someone’s life, to have a friend experience God’s love and be the recipient of God’s grace and mercy, to have them hear the life-giving gospel to gain the keys to heaven is not a light. Then why did Jesus say, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light?” It is because Christ takes the weight and the responsibilities off of our shoulders and put it on his, just like Jesus took our sins and burdens off of our cross and placed on his on his way to be hung on the cross.

Jesus is not inviting us to a life of ease. Following him will be full of risks and challenges. Yet, Christ calls us to a life of humble service, being gentle and humble in heart. Christ is inviting us to a life of freedom and joy, a life yoked to himself under God’s grace and mercy, to reassure us that our salvation is intact, and our souls do not need to worry but rest deeply and securely in God’s promises.

True rest comes not from escaping our responsibilities but finding solace and fulfillment in our divine purpose. Spiritual maturity is not an arrival point where we cease to grow but a continuous process of aligning our hearts and actions with the teachings of Christ. As we accept Christ’s yoke, we find rest for our souls, knowing that we are fulfilling our purpose and calling of God.

Therefore, siblings in Christ, let us press on this day, knowing that the answer to “Are we there yet?” lies not in a destination but in our unwavering dedication to following Christ and to live out God’s purpose for our lives, starting with those who are closest and dearest, and nearest to us. And maybe it simply begins in our vehicles, showing patience and grace. Amen.