

Pastor Roy's Sermon from July 9, 2017

Exodus: Children

Do you find it hard to keep up with everything? Do you find it tough to keep up with expectations, demands, and needs—many of which are of your own making? At times we barely think about it, but from time to time we feel the weight of the burden. Whether we're working, volunteering, getting along with family members, figuring out our phones and computers, or even keeping flowers and vegetables alive, we worry about managing all this stuff around us. It's a lot to think about, sometimes it fills us with a quiet dread. I think it's fair to say we spend much energy trying to get it right and worrying when we don't. We try so hard that at times our minds even pretend that all is well even though it is not. This living is a tough business.

And Jesus says, "Come to 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 for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." What is Jesus' light harness and easy backpack?

Part of the back drop of Jesus' teachings on rest and trust is Zechariah and the other prophets who proclaimed something different from the working politics of their day—a political scene in which they had very little influence. The prophets proclaim a peaceable kingdom where war is set aside and wisdom reigns. The faith of the Jews will guide their way. This new kind of king is not a pushy, greedy one, but gentle instead.

It sounds like the prophets are talking about something that hasn't yet happened, but they are actually tapping into the timeless foundation of Judaism. They are calling their people back to the freedom of Exodus. In Jesus' day, as in the book of Exodus, they live under foreign rule. They are not slaves but peasants with no power. Wise living grows out of prayer and listening to the profound, essential rhythm of life. Exodus calls the Jews to live in a reality that is true no matter what happens. Therein is freedom.

The Jews' God looks out for everyone, especially those who are forgotten or ignored. Perhaps the earliest memory of the Jews was their ancestors the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt. Abused. Seemingly forgotten. Yahweh hears their cries and calls on Moses to set them free. They are released from slavery and remember it every year at Passover with the Seder meal. Sweet Freedom. They were slaves set free. The original covenant calls them to live with compassion in their newfound freedom.

We as Christians use the same speech. The blood of the New Covenant is that offered by Jesus because love is important enough to die for. The apostles were so changed by this teacher and practitioner of compassionate love, that it came to be known as the new covenant in Christ's blood, no longer the blood of a lamb offered to appease the anger of a distant God. Jesus is God come near. God as love and mercy and peace. Nothing has changed about the essence of this faith of the Jews now offered to all. All are welcome, all are set free. Freedom in mercy leading to peace.

As Jesus says, "Come to 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 for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus is calling us to freedom. His definition of freedom is revealed in the words: gentle, humble, rest.

It is a heavy burden to be right, time and time again. It is a heavy burden to be in charge of having enough. It is a heavy burden to defend the status quo, to keep things as they have always been, to not ask the questions which live in our hearts.

But it is freedom: to be able to start again. It is freedom to listen and set aside the need to have the right answer. It is freedom to meditate and pray about the carefree ways of plants and animals in the wild. It is freedom to consider new possibilities in our lives, in our congregations, in our communities, and nations.

For my Yoke is easy and my burden is light.

If the burden of our faith is not light, if it is heavy, perhaps we are mistaking burdensome trouble for freedom. We might need to listen more carefully to Jesus who offers an easy harness and light back pack. Let us listen, indeed.

May we seek our gentle Lord, our humble God, a rest-infused life of compassion which mirrors the free and true Spirit of Christ at work in the world today.

Compassion, rest, gentleness. Amen.