

“Come to Me”
Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30
Sermon Preached by Thomas P. Markey
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As a parent of two young children, I have come to the humbling realization that having any real concrete expectations or making any sweeping assumptions is the fastest way to be immediately proven wrong.

For your pleasure, here’s a sampling:

“I have finally got the nap routine down; the girls will definitely take naps today.” – The “nap routine” I was so confident in fails miserably, Eden either cries and wakes up Ella or Ella runs into Eden’s room and wakes her up. It is now 5:00PM and everyone – including Dad – is tired and cranky.

“Ella will absolutely eat this grilled cheese sandwich I’ve made for her.” – Two brownies and purple popsicle later and the grilled cheese is now cold and Ella can’t sit still because she so hyped up on sugar.

“I’m sure Eden will sleep really well tonight.” – Fast forward. It is now 4AM, Eden is rolling on the floor laughing and I’m ready to cry.

“No. Her diaper doesn’t need to be changed before we leave for Indianapolis.” – “Hey Abbie, we have a problem! Eden blew out her diaper and there’s poop all over the car seat!”

In many ways, this is not unlike our lives as people of faith. It is easy and tempting to expect and assume. We all have ideas about how we should most faithfully and fruitfully live our lives. We expect and assume that others have arrived at the same or similar expectations and assumptions. We expect and assume that God will reveal God’s self in very particular and very tangible ways.

Apparently, as our text today highlights, this behavior is nothing new. It appears as though the people have drawn their own concrete expectations and have arrived at their own sweeping assumptions about how people of faith – especially people of prophetic and messianic proportions – should walk, talk, eat, sleep, dress, and behave.

First, there is John the Baptist. He’s too “conservative.” “[He] came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’”¹

¹ NRSV, Matthew 11:18.

Second, there is Jesus of Nazareth. He's too "liberal." "[He] came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"²

One commentator paints a beautiful comparison,

They could scarcely be more different, these two: John, the bug-eating wilderness prophet, and Jesus, who is known to love a good meal with all kinds of company; John, who wears scratchy shirts on purpose, and Jesus, who can occasionally be persuaded to invoke the power of YHWH to keep the wine flowing at a wedding reception; John who addresses his hearers as a "brood of vipers," and Jesus who in Matthew opens his signature sermon with congratulations.³

Much to the surprise of the people, Jesus explains that this is exactly God's plan. He does so through a brief but powerful parable, highlighting the ways in which – though John and Jesus are different – they have both experienced a similar rejection. Neither message and neither methodology meets the expectations or the assumptions of the people.

In this way, Jesus says, the people have been behaving as "children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'" Put simply, the people have been acting like "[sneaky little] children who [continue] to change the rules of the game."⁴

"Yet," Jesus concludes, "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."⁵ Divine wisdom – God's revelation to us – Jesus says, appears to us in ways and in deeds we rarely, if ever, expect or assume. This can be challenging for us to hear.

As one commentator aptly notes, "Both of these messages [both from John and Jesus] are a threat to our hard-won autonomy. We long to maintain a happy medium between John's stifling demands and Jesus' frightening inclusiveness. So we keep changing our tune, insisting on the moderation that we can secure for ourselves, not the extraordinary future that God dreams for us and the world."⁶

Now, in all honesty, it would be perfectly reasonable if this is where Jesus chose to conclude this particular teaching moment. However, as we heard read today, instead of leaving us in a state of uncertainty and

² NRSV, Matthew 11:19.

³ Lance Pape, *Feasting on the Word*, 213.

⁴ Lance Pape, *Feasting on the Word*, 213.

⁵ NRSV, Matthew 11:19.

⁶ Pape, 215.

uneasiness, Jesus offers a prayer to God for us and with us, a prayer that is followed by an invitation, “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.”⁷

It is in this invitation that we are offered a unique opportunity. We are invited into a life of discipleship. When Jesus says, “...and learn from me...” the Greek phrase is *mathete ap’ emou* which is related to the Greek word *mathetes* which is the word for “disciple.” Thus, our invitation to discipleship comes with the understanding that as disciples – or more accurately as learners – we are willing and eager to engage the fullness of what it means to take the yoke of Jesus upon us.

Utilizing the divine wisdom that has been revealed to us through Jesus’ teaching in the first three verses of today’s reading, these final and familiar three verses take on a renewed and reinvigorated meaning. The invitation to discipleship – the invitation to be “learners” – is far from our expectations and assumptions.

“Come.” “Take.” “Learn.” “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” This is not simply a call to a life of ease with an extended vacation. It is a directive as to how one might faithfully and fruitfully adopt of life of discipleship, a life of learning.

What then does this life of discipleship – this life of learning – entail for us? Well, if we’re being honest, it seems like a life that is anything but “easy” and “light.” A quick survey of Matthew’s Gospel alone reveals to us that the “easy yoke” and “light burden” of Jesus requires us to be “the salt of the earth” and “light of the world” – a life in which we will be subjected to rejection and suffering all the while being called to “love our enemies” and to “pray for those who persecute us.”

Here Jesus goes again, dismantling our expectations and disrupting our assumptions.

Lance Pape, an associate professor of Homiletics at Brite Divinity School, offers this powerful reflection on a life of discipleship as we take the yoke of Jesus upon us,

What Jesus offers is not freedom from work, but freedom from [burdensome and troublesome] labor. Soul-sick weariness is not the inevitable consequence of all work, but rather of work to which we are ill suited, of work extracted under compulsion and motivated by fear, or of work performed in the face of futility. There is also the weariness that comes from having nothing at all

⁷ NRSV, Matthew 11:28-30.

to do that truly matters. The easy yoke means having something to do: a purpose that demands your all and summons forth your best. It means work that is motivated by a passionate desire to see God's kingdom realized. It means work toward a certain future in which all of God's dreams will finally come true. To accept the yoke of the gentle and humble Lord is to embrace the worthy task that puts the soul at ease.⁸

“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.”

Friends, what yoke of Jesus are you currently being asked to wear? Amen.

⁸ Lance Pape, *Feasting on the Word*, 217.