

The Fifth Sunday of Pentecost
 A Sermon preached by
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 Christ Church, Dartmouth

July 5, 2020

“Scrum Sled”

I remember when I was a young boy, and I read this morning’s passage from Matthew, and the words “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” I always wondered what eggs had to do with a heavy burden. Certainly, a meal of bacon and eggs makes me feel better, but as I grew somewhat wiser, I discovered that Jesus was not talking about breakfast.

The yoke Jesus speaks of relates to the Jewish tradition, where the laws of the faith influence indicated how the faithfully lived. It’s not always easy following laws is it? Well maybe for some of us it is! In Matthew, Jesus picks up on the fact that sometimes people face tough decisions, and that Our Lord is in our midst as we try and do what is right. Jesus uses is an image of the yoke.

A yoke is a wooden crosspiece that is fastened over the necks of two animals and then attached to the plow or cart that they pull. Picture oxen pushing, plowing through the fields to allow for planting, growth, and harvesting. The image of the yoke in many ways, ties together two beasts of burden. This image of the yoke is beautiful, because it tells us that we never walk alone, that Christ is with us, and that there will be times, where one of us will be weak and the other strong. You see, there are moments when one ox carries a greater load because the other animal is tired.

So which oxen are we? The tired one or the strong one? I tend to think that Jesus is saying that there will be times when we are both. Times when Jesus will allow us to move forward even though we are weak. How many times have we experienced sadness, grief, and sorrow in our lives? How many times has our relationship with Christ and our prayers lifted us so that we could go through these experiences, instead of around them?

When we are weak, we may stumble. When we don’t agree with one another, it sometimes is difficult to understand how we can plant and grow something beautiful. That’s the moment I believe Jesus’ words “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” hold significant meaning. What are we yoking ourselves to? Is it greed? Judgment? Anger? Or pride? I think, as humans, we’ve all entered these sinful areas.

One of the challenges that we as a church, and as a community face is that often society feels we are supposed to be perfect. Because we are a “religious institution,” society seems to think that what we do should be 100% correct. We often hear “well they don’t act very Christian like.” When I talk about not being perfect, I include myself in such conversations! Nicky Gumbel once said, “stop looking for the perfect church. It does not exist. Even if it did exist, the moment we joined it, it would no longer be perfect!” And then there is Joseph B. Wirthlin a member of the Mormon faith who said:

“The church is not a place where perfect people gather to say perfect things, or have perfect thoughts, or have perfect feelings. The church is a place where imperfect people gather to provide encouragement, support, and service to each other as we press on in our journey to return to our Heavenly Father.”

As you most likely are aware, we’ve decided to begin in-person worship starting the 19th of this month. This is a massive undertaking, and I want to thank all those who have committed themselves to making sure we gather safely. As churches in our Dartmouth region and beyond begin to gather or to consider in-person worship, we need to pray for one another. This task before us will be a burden of sorts. It will take time; it will take patience, it will take responsibly, it will take prayer. Just like plowing the fields, we may need to stop and reset the yoke.

As we aim for our 8:00am and 10:00am services, we recognize that adjustments may need to be made. One of the things that I would like to ask us to do is to pray for our parishioners who have offered their time, talent and treasure. People who are willing to clean and to spend hours before and after our Sunday services. There will be times when we are all tired and when we don’t feel like pressing forward. There may be times when we may pause for a week of worship so that we can take our rest. Jesus is present in all our deliberations, providing us comfort, telling us we never walk alone, telling us that it’s okay to be weak, saying “I’ll take the burden, I can carry.”

As you may know, sports are important in my life. Not only do I encourage the arts with my boys, but also team sports. I think working in a group to come to a goal is an admirable feat. The game of rugby has been important to my family. My uncle played for both UPEI and UNB, and the Halifax Rugby 7s. My cousin played for the Newfoundland Rock and is a member of the Swilers Rugby Club. I never did play rugby as I was mostly at the hockey rink, on the baseball field or the golf course.

One of the things that I admire about rugby is how tough you need to be. Not only do you see sturdy women and men pushing one another, but you see teammates who are lean and fast. Each player has a role to play. The scrum is a part of the game where a play is restarted. It involves players packing firmly together, with heads down, attempting to push the opposing team away to gain possession of the ball. When you witness a scrum, you hear lots of grunting and groaning!

To perfect the scrum, teams often practice with what is called a scrum sled. Football teams use this equipment as well. A scrum sled is a piece of machinery that acts as a barrier for players who practice their “plowing forward” as the sled mimics the opposing team. It develops strength and agility. In many ways, the sled looks like a yoke as you have men and women joined together, all pushing towards the same goal. The scrum sled is an analogy for sharing the burden.

After a hard practice of rugby or hockey, one often feels tired. I remember a Bantam hockey practice where the coach never let us touch a puck. We had won our previous game, but we didn’t play that well. My teammates and I had to skate back and forth the entire length of the

ice for an hour straight. Let's just say there were some of us who were getting sick over the boards after practice.

There are going to be times in the life of our church where we will feel exhausted, and we don't want to press on. Times when we won't agree. These are the moments where we are to invite the Holy Spirit, the moments when we remember Jesus' place in our lives, when we say to one another, "okay, you take this push, because I'm tired."

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."

AMEN.