

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

WEARY WISE GUYS

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

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.”

25 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; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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.”

Note: The concept of dependence/independence used below comes from the chapter on “Christening” found in Robert Bertram’s book A Time for Confessing (Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2008), pp 184-192.

DIAGNOSIS: Weary (Rest-Deprived) Wise Guys

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *I Get No Rest*

"This generation" is fickle and oh, so critical, Jesus asserts. It scorns John's call to repentance (vv. 11-15), gossiping that he is demon-possessed (v. 18). It ridicules Jesus for his friendship with sinners, calling him a glutton and drunkard (v. 24). Such criticalness, even if it makes one look good by comparison, damages the soul and makes for "heavy burdens." One can never measure up to perfection. The possibility of genuine "Sabbath rest" (peace with creation and the Creator) vanishes; only harried, frantic living remains.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *I've Got the System Down Pat*

"This generation" thinks it's got God's Torah (let's call it "the system") so well figured out that it can excel at it, a feat this generation considers its superiority, its grownup-ness, its wisdom. Interestingly, the rabbis call the system (that is, God's Torah), a "yoke." But here is where critical blunder Number One is made. This generation concludes that the Torah gives definitive insight into the heart of God, and so the better you adhere to Torah, the more intimately you "know" God; by extension, the better you know God, the better you are able to please God. No need for Jesus; the goal is self-attainable (albeit extremely stressful). Critical blunder Number Two reasons that "mature wisdom" is to be desired over "infancy" (v. 25), or a better word might be "dependence" (Bertram, "Christening"). The problem is that these "wise grown-ups" foolishly opt for the supposed grownup-ness, the supposed wisdom of independence.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *The System's*

Killing Me!

But independence, cutting the cords of dependence upon God, leads not to freedom, not to perfect Sabbath-rest, but to complete loss. You don't know me at all, God says, and you have not reached my heart! Only "the Son knows the Father," Jesus explains, and "anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (v. 27). Wise guys miss out on having God as Father. Instead, in their haughtiness, and consequent failure to repent, Jesus warns, they "will be brought down to Hades" (v. 23). "On the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you" (v. 24).

PROGNOSIS: Invigorated (Rest-Full) Dependents

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *I Rest My Case*

Unlike these supposed-wise guys, Jesus glories in his dependence and mercifully works to reestablish the same for lost independents. He literally becomes the Father's "gracious will" for sinners, including those heavy-laden, weary-wise guys to whom he yokes himself; he takes their self-inflicted, self-deserved "yokes" on himself and gets crushed in their stead. Such an exchange prompts the Father to declare: "I rest my case." This alternate wisdom is vindicated on Easter when God raises his beloved Dependent to life, enthroning him as Lord of the Sabbath, chief rest-giver.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *A Rest-Full System*

With the greatest of gentleness and humbleness of heart (v. 29), Jesus extends his offer of Sabbath-rest to all weary and heavy burdened, even wise guys. It becomes a simple matter of taking that rest earned by Jesus in faith, and by so doing, becoming God's dependents once again. Dependents who assume a new *modus operandi*, or "yoke," which, not surprisingly, mimics Christ's own: a yoke of mercy and forgiveness. Christ even gives a

“Helper,” the holying Spirit, to help dependents learn to depend (Time for Confessing, p. 195-199).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *“Ah, Invigorating Rest!”*

Those yoked to Jesus find themselves invigorated to truly live. Because they experience Sabbath-rest they are freed from self-absorption and have the energy to involve themselves in lightening their neighbors loads—not only by helping carry their loads, but also by reminding them about Jesus, upon whom they can depend and unload all their burdens.