

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

THE NEW YOKE

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

(Proper 9-Sunday between July 3 and 9
Inclusive)

analysis by Michael Hoy

16Jesus spoke to the crowd saying: "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.' 18For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; 19the 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." 25At that time, Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27All 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. 28Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

DIAGNOSIS: Carrying Heavy Burdens

Step 1-Initial Diagnosis: The burdens of this generation
“To what will I compare this generation?” Jesus asks. The fact is that “this generation” to which Jesus refers is already making its own comparisons – particularly a comparison of Jesus and John, and finding itself satisfied with neither. John was too dour; Jesus was too much of a party person. Like “grumps” who will not play together at funerals or weddings, this generation has already made some harsh judgments about John and Jesus – neither are to be owned or embraced.

Step 2-Advanced Diagnosis: Hidden to the wise and intelligent
The dipstick of Jesus’ critics is the yoke of Moses, the law, by which they prided themselves as “wise and intelligent.” In our own generations, we engage in the practice of measuring others by our standards, sometimes wise and intelligent standards, as, undoubtedly, these legalists have come to learn and practice quite well. However, for all their (and our) supposed wisdom – and even pride in their wisdom – they (and we) are foolishly in the dark. We cannot know God, because we cannot know or acknowledge the Son who is in our midst by the standards we cling to. God, therefore, remains “hidden,” deus absconditus. The yoke is heavier on our beings than we realize, forcing us to measure up to its standards, keeping us in the state of having to justify our own existence.

Step 3-Final Diagnosis: The judgment of “woe”
The verses not included, around which this gospel forms the bookends (vs. 20-24) speak the most critical diagnosis on the wise and intelligent of this generation – woe! Because there is no turning from the burdened and burdening life, God’s judgment is to make sure we are in the dark. And the final judgment is the strongest: “I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you” (v. 24).

PROGNOSIS: Finding Rest

Step 4-Initial Prognosis: The vindication of Wisdom

Because none of us can bear up under the weight of our accountability before God, Jesus bears this yoke's immensity. In Jesus, the Wisdom of God necessarily becomes cruciformed to put to death the wisdom of Moses and the law's critical judgments. The real Wisdom of God in Jesus is not simply that Jesus was right (i.e., his wisdom of life and living), but that we become right. The divine Wisdom comes into being in the life and death of Jesus – to give us rest from the labor of having to justify ourselves, and resting in the justification that Jesus brings, in our midst, at our table. For us, instead of the judgment of God's final woe, there is the judgment of final vindication.

Step 5-Advanced Prognosis: The revelation to infants

This Wisdom in Jesus is gained not by our own standards of wisdom and understanding, but by taking the standard, the authority, by which Jesus measures us. The joy of this new dipstick is that we get measured up righteous in our child-like beings, infants, who treasure the promise by faith and have it thereby revealed. We get to celebrate in the wedding-game that Jesus has now brought on the scene, whereby we are wed with God through Jesus' merits.

Step 6-Final Prognosis: Bearing the kind yoke

The new generation that Jesus spawns is one that bears up under his "easy" or better, "kind" yoke. It does not mean that all accountability has passed; but we are free to be the responsible beings in Christ that bear the burdens of living in this age, this generation, with a hope and vision that "learns from Jesus" what it means to be truly wise and understanding – yoking others by the kindness of Jesus by which we ourselves have become yoked.