

Third Sunday after Pentecost

OF BRATS AND BABIES

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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Analysis by Dana Bjorlin

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.”

[20 Then he began to reproach the cities in which most of his deeds of power had been done, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum,

will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.”]

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."

Author's Note: Why the pericope authors omit vv. 20-24 from this lection is hard to understand. In Year C the chosen text also omits Luke's parallel and begins with the verse immediately following. To get the full force of the comfort in vv. 27-30, it's vital to catch the contrast of the other alternative... and yet to realize that Jesus doesn't really desire to exclude anyone from his gracious and loving care.

DIAGNOSIS: All Our Sorrows

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Broad Un-Appeal

A key concept to determine in this text is just who are the all (v. 28)? Sometimes it's easy to miss the universality/catholicity of the groups we are individually parts of. Consider the pastoral care department where I work. We've got "evangelical" Protestants, "mainline" Protestants, and Roman Catholics of several shades of liberal and conservative. The staff priest grew up and was ordained in Nigeria. Our permanent staff is noticeably graying, yet the CPE program regularly brings in 20-somethings to learn from and enrich our group's

makeup. One of our staff is unashamed that iconic/iconoclastic preacher Jeremiah Wright (thrown under the bus by Candidate Obama to ease his election) is a minister of her church body; another's spouse might eagerly accept a chance to "go whalin' with Palin." We minister to patients, families and staff that are Anglo, Hispanic, Afro-American, Asian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Wiccan, atheist, vegan, alternative in lifestyle, etc. My workplace certainly has something universal/catholic about it. Scratch the surface only a little and something of the all might also be found in most any family, community, congregation, etc.

Jesus encountered the all in his own generation (v. 16). And in their all-encompassing entirety they were saying No to the message of God's kingdom. Whether that message was packaged by John the Baptist or by Jesus, all of the crowds (v. 7) found their way to say No to it (vv. 18 -19).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Just Like Brats*

Our text further shows us that the all behave in an all-encompassing childish manner. Jesus compared his own generation to a bunch of preschoolers who incessantly cried, "No!" Though claiming Jesus won't join them, really it's the other way around. No, we won't dance with you Jesus. No, we won't cry with you. No, no, no (v. 17)! CPE training teaches that unresolved issues from childhood can impact care givers in later life, just like they impact the patients and family members we encounter in the here and now. Robert Fulghum may believe that All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, but still there are issues that remain unresolved after kindergarten as well. Saying "no" to Jesus means we have not yet learned the wisdom he gives. We have met the brats of the childish all and they are us.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Repentance Refusal*

Similarly, the very places where Jesus did most of his deeds of

power join up with all the others who find a way to say no to him. Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum are reproached by Jesus because they too refused to listen, refused to repent. But these deeds of power were not something for them to exalt in (v. 23). Rather, they were signs of the kingdom's close approach. As such they should have so sharply contrasted with the normal state of affairs as to have been a portent of repentance. As Canadians (July 1) and Americans (July 4) celebrate their countries' birthdays this weekend, what Jesus said to the communities of Galilee needs to be considered closely: blessings, deeds of power, or prosperity are not guarantees for ongoing exaltation. Because individuals, communities, ethnicities, countries refuse to repent, they will not be exalted to heaven, rather they will be brought down to hell (Hades; v. 23)! "The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise... (yet) they have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse" (Ps. 14:2 & 3).

The common problem experienced by the all above is their seeming reliance on their own selves and their self-decided standards for what God's kingdom is about. Their common problem leads to their common condemnation.

PROGNOSIS: All His Joys

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Bearing Our Burdens*

Jesus invites all to give up this silly self-reliance and learn from him. He is willing and ready to bear their burdensome loads-all of the burdens that the brats of broad refusal are carrying. Bearing these loads will bring him to a cross in Jerusalem-another locale that refused to repent. Bearing these loads will lead him to carry that cross to a place of utter abandonment, the Place of the Skull where he will die all alone-the full effect of the No's of all. In dying, he himself will

travel the road to hell (see the Apostles' Creed). And in his death he will share with all of these needy ones all that have been handed over to him by his heavenly Father (v. 27). Rest, rather than death, hell, or the heavy load, is the offer he gives when he invites all to come to him (v. 28).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Revealed to Babies*

Truly, such good news does not find easy acceptance in the world, in a nation, or family, or even in a congregation. Jesus describes those who accept his offer of burden-bearing as infants (v. 25). Not like brats who demand that others move to the tunes of our pretentious playtime, infants are able to recognize God's gracious will and to accept it. Later in Matthew, Jesus will state that the kingdom belongs to the "little children" (19:14). Being totally dependent, infants are not hung up on needing their own space or demanding their own perspective. Trusting Jesus relieves us of our burdens.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Yoked to Jesus*

The image of a yoke implies a partner or helper sharing a task. Jesus gives us the promise that as we take his yoke upon us, we learn from him. In addition, he tells us that his burden is light. Therefore we can come to him whenever we become weary or find ourselves on overload. Furthermore, this light burden that Jesus gives inspires us to care for all those around us-at work, in our families, our churches, our nation, this world. Yoked to Jesus, we become "little Christs" by lightening other people's burdens and heavy loads: we join them in bearing those burdens and relieving them as they unload their loads onto the Master Burden-Bearer. Now, despite all the variety we find in our offices, families, communities, etc., we know that we can mourn with the sorrows of all and dance with the joys of all.