

Psalm 145:8-14

145:8 The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

145:9 The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Page | 1 145:10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you.

145:11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

145:12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

145:13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

145:14 The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

11:16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

11:17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

11:18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon';

11:19 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."

11:25 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;

11:26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

11:27 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.

11:28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

11:29 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.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Proclamation of the Word

"Looking for a win-win." It's a phrase that took off with the popularity of Steven Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. A win-win is the 4th habit that Covey highlights. Usually we have been taught that life is a zero sum game. For me to win, you must lose. We are taught that competition is the highest value. There is only so much pie to go around, and if you get a bigger piece, I get less. I lose.

But to look for a win-win means that we seek a cooperative approach. We seek a situation that is mutually beneficial. It is a character approach that requires courage, cooperation, and maturity rather than "my way or the high way." Many people see this in the business and work arena.

One place I see it is in our approach to a style of Cooperative Recreation in the church. Recreation that encourages people to work together, enjoy themselves, and solve issues, where everyone is invited to join in. Through the Recreation network I have met many folks skilled in this form of recreation. I am sure at Clemson's Recreation department, there are those schooled in group initiatives and cooperative recreation. Through Church recreation, I got to know Vincent. Vincent is a pharmacist by trade and Irish. We have attended Montreat's Annual Recreation Workshop together. He has flown over from his native Ireland many times to develop skills in cooperative recreation which he uses in working with youth to do peacemaking. Vincent knows from a culture bent on fighting century old fights which are rooted in religion, Catholic vs. Protestant, and nationalism, that the only way forward is to move forward together. As a Christian he works to create win-win situations and cooperation. Through recreation Vincent is building relationships where people who once feared and hated each other are brought together to appreciate and learn from one another. What they learn is that they have much more in common than they ever realized.

It seems that our world is in great need of this win-win approach. In politics, global relationships, church community, much of the time we see the games people play as do it my way or I will take my marbles and go home.

In Matthew's gospel this generation is described as immature, fickle children. They don't know what they want. They refuse to cooperate. They play petty games. They don't like John the Baptist because he is too austere, crying out in the wilderness, to repent and return to God. John is all doom and gloom and judgment. But Jesus is too liberal with his approach. He is eating with tax-collectors and sinners, announcing that the kingdom of God is a joyful, wedding party. The Jerusalem religious elite are getting their noses out of joint over Jesus. Jesus is the first one on the dance floor calling the rest to come on and enjoy the blessings of God, but the religious leaders are crying foul. It seems like a no-win situation. Neither John, nor Jesus, fit their idea of faithfulness.

Still others like the towns of Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, ignore Jesus' deeds of healing power and do not recognize Jesus as the revelation of God in their midst. They are too busy fishing, working, consumed by production to take note of the Lord God visible in Jesus. Even folks in his hometown, Capernaum, cannot see who Jesus truly is, the Son of God.

Perhaps it is because Jesus is not at all what they have expected. The long-awaited messiah, the Christ in Greek, was the one hoped for to bring about justice and well-being for the people of faith. Jesus wasn't at all what they expected. He ignored the laws they had been taught by the Pharisees and Sadducees. He healed on the Sabbath and allowed his disciples to pluck wheat to eat on the Sabbath. He was not ignoring the law but reminding them of a new reality. He is Lord of the Sabbath and comes to bring rest, healing, wholeness and well-being as God the Father intended it. Earlier when John's disciples ask if Jesus is the messiah, he says, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor

have good news brought to them." (Matthew 11:4-5) His deeds speak of the Kingdom of God come near.

Jesus then offers a prayer for us. He identifies God as lord of heaven and earth, ruler of all creation. Even though the Emperor claims to rule the land, it is God's realm and kingdom. Jesus then speaks of a yoke. A yoke was a symbol of rule and ownership. Slaves wore them as did oxen plowing fields. A yoke required obedience. In Jewish tradition the Law or Torah is your yoke. If you wear the yoke of Rome or the British Crown or the USA, it is that which rules you. These citizens have borne the yoke of Rome and empire. Jesus offers a different way. His yoke is good and kind. Actually good and kind is a better translation of the Greek than "easy". Yet another meaning is "well-fitted" so that the ox could work best without sores and chafing. His kingship is humble, meek, and compassionate. God's kingship is good and kind. As the Psalmist sings:

For the LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made. (Ps. 145:1-2)

On this weekend when we celebrate our country's independence, I am reminded of our Presbyterian ties to the American Revolution. Deep within American Presbyterian DNA is a concern for our (quote from the Book of Order) "tendency for idolatry and tyranny which calls us to work for the transformation of society by seeking justice and living in obedience to the Word (that is Jesus) of God." (Book of Order, F-2.05) So no wonder Presbyterians were at the front lines of the revolution. Did you know...?

- That the 1775 Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia was the first religious body to call for separation from England. (and our Assemblies are still making waves)
- King George III called the war a "Presbyterian War"
- A member of the British Parliament said, "There is no use crying about it. Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson, and that is the end of it." Referring to John Witherspoon, signer of the Declaration of Independence and President of Princeton.

With a strong sense of justice and a fervent belief the Jesus is Lord, even of kings and governors, our ancestors refused the yoke of the crown and fought what they saw as the tyranny. That is why we declare in our Constitution that "God alone is Lord of the conscience." (see Book of Order, F-3.0101 a.) We treasure that religious freedom so dearly. But we are not simply independent and free of nothing. When Jesus invites us to take on his good and kind yoke, he offers to be our Lord and Master. When we are subjects of Jesus, then we are truly set free. As Martin Luther put it, "we are truly free when we decide that to which we will be bound."

Instead of the burden of law, Jesus offers us a new law, one based on grace and love. The law will be that which sets people free to be whole, healed, to know the love of God, and to respond in active obedience. Jesus offers us a win-win.

Page | 4 We also have to remember that we do nothing alone. A yoke was often built for a pair of oxen. Bound together they were a team. They served together in common work and mission. When Jesus invites us to take his yoke upon us and learn from him, he is saying become my yoke mate, learn how to work together pulling the load together. Watch how I serve, and you will learn from me. This will make your burden, your work load light. As a church dependent on Jesus and one another, we should pause and ask:

Are we sharing the load?

Are our tasks well-fitted suiting the gifts and skills of each?

Are we learning from Christ?

Are we walking and working where Jesus directs and guides us, ministering as he did with gentleness and humility?

As we celebrate our independence, let us also celebrate our dependence.

We cooperate with each other and with the Lord in a labor of life-giving witness.

We seek a win-win in the face of so many no-win situations.

Every time we gather at this table together- the Lord's Table- we acknowledge our dependence on Jesus the Messiah, the Christ,

Not with fireworks and flags, but with bread broken and a cup poured out.

So let us declare today our Dependence Day by relying on the presence and the power of the Lord of our lives. Through this we will be truly free!

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