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“What do you want?” **Sermon on Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

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Good morning Westminster, happy 5th of July! I hope y'all are enjoying the holiday weekend and all the accompanying celebrations. It is such a joy and an honor to be with you all today. I am so grateful for having been here for the past year and in all of the ways I have been loved well by this church.

Our passage for this morning comes at the end of a conversation Jesus is having about John the Baptist. John had sent messengers to ask Jesus if He was truly the Messiah. Jesus's response is, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." Once John's disciples leave, Jesus begins talking to the crowds about who John is. John is the one who has prepared the way. John is the new Elijah, proclaiming God's word with a prophetic voice. This is where we find ourselves this morning. With questions about who is Jesus and with the path prepared.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30.

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 who 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.”

To what will I compare this generation? This has been a question humanity has always been fascinated by. Earlier this week I had dinner with my parents, and the topic of AI came up. It feels impossible to get through a conversation about AI without people making some comparison of what “this” generation is like. We are all deeply concerned with understanding and letting people know how we understand this generation.

Jesus seems to relate to our humanity in this way. And so, He explores the topic through one of His favorite means, a parable. The parable is based around these children who play a game of call and response in the markets. At a Presbyterian church I expect we all have a familiarity with call and response. Y’all have been crushing it this morning with the call and response. The only way our liturgies function is if people respond. The church can’t be the church if we don’t engage in call and response. And can you imagine what it would look like on a Sunday morning if everyone refused to engage?

No one responds to the Call to Confession. We all stay silent when it’s time to pass the peace. If Jane played the flute and no one sang along, that would be terrible. And if you’re ever interested in seeing what that would be like, just make sure to try it out during a week Donovan is leading. So, this is the comparison Jesus makes. This generation does not respond. Jesus has come playing the flute. He’s at parties, turning water into wine. And what do they say? “He’s a glutton and a drunkard.” John takes a very different approach. He wails. He cries out against sin and the injustices around him. What do they say? “He has a demon.” “What do you want?”

Jesus is asking, “What will be good enough for this generation to respond?” They won’t dance. They won’t mourn. “What do you want from me?” That’s what Jesus is asking. That’s how He views that generation. And the answer’s clear, nothing will be good enough. It doesn’t matter what instrument or what tune, that generation was never going to accept Jesus. No matter God’s approach - they were going to reject Him. Because it wasn’t about how Jesus or John ministered to them, they weren’t going to listen. They were always going to kill them both.

What does God have to do to get you to participate? This generation, what do you want from God? We’ve all prayed some version of that prayer. “Dear God if you do just this one thing, I promise I’ll do this or I’ll stop doing that.” “What do you want?” It’s a dangerous question. First, it requires some real honesty. You catch me on the right day or the wrong day, I’m not particularly proud of what I want. I want that person to be quiet. I would like more money. I’d like total control of all the relationships in my life. And sometimes we answer it and it hurts. Because we realize we’re not going to get what we want.

When John sends his disciples to Jesus, do you know what John wants? To be freed from prison. He doesn’t get that. He gets killed. It’s a dangerous question because we can get a little bit too attached to our answers. Jesus never asks this generation what they want. But that generation is pretty eager to answer that question. They are ready to tell John and Jesus how to behave and what to do because there’s another way to read Jesus’s parable. Instead of that generation being the ones who won’t dance or mourn, that generation are the ones calling out. They have the flutes. They’re playing their songs and they are getting upset.

Jesus and John won’t get in line. The religious leaders, the Pharisees, have sung a tune and God doesn’t seem all that interested in playing their game of call and response. We love to do the same thing. We grab the flute from God, we play our tune, go by our own rhythm, and

then we get upset when God doesn't dance. We call out to God, "God I said the right prayers, you didn't show up how I told you to. Lord, I made that sacrifice, you didn't comfort me." It's a dangerous game to expect God to start operating on our terms.

So, what is this generation? Are we people telling God what to do? Or is God calling out to us and we aren't responding? "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." This is a noisy parable. There are flutes and wailing and calling out. But Jesus ends with a comment about action. Well, what are we supposed to do? What are the moves to this song Jesus is playing?

Here's one answer. On the youth mission trip to Jamaica this last month, this was an answer we talked about. It's the answer Jesus gave earlier. "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk... the deaf hear..." Go do that. And if you aren't a doctor or if charismatic healing isn't for you, don't worry, Jesus maybe had you in mind, "..., and the poor have good news brought to them." Are you hearing the music? There are tangible responses. Go find the poor. Find the sick. Be with those who are without. And make some good news for them.

The lectionary cuts out the next part. In some ways it's understandable, but they are a few, fun verses. Jesus calls out a bunch of cities where He performed miracles and they didn't respond. Jesus gets real fire and brimstone on them. There's a "Woe to" and references to the day of judgment. It's Jesus expanding on what He just said. The Lord called out to them and they did not respond. Woe to those who do not respond.

Then Jesus makes a sharp turn. He begins to thank God for who He has chosen to make these things known to. Jesus thanks God for how He reveals the Kingdom to infants, not the wise and intelligent. Both Jesus and the Father seem to have a special heart for those of low status. For the infants and for the poor. And they seem to have some harsher words for those who have power and the wise.

It causes a moment of pause for someone like me. I'm in youth ministry, there is no doubt in mind of how God loves young people. I find it beautiful and a gift to witness it. But I am also someone who is currently getting a Master of Divinity. That might put me closer to the camp of the wise and intelligent than it does the infant, though I'm sure there are people in my life who disagree with that assessment of my wisdom. I don't think it condemns me, but it does cause some caution. That's a dangerous camp to be in. It might mean I have to listen extra hard for God's music amidst all the noise of my degrees and comfort. And it certainly means there is a greater responsibility to respond.

In talking about who the Father is revealed to Jesus says, "no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Who will the Son choose to reveal the Father to? Yes, I know the infants, but anyone else? Well, Jesus continues, "'Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens.'" Who does Jesus choose? Those who are weary and carry heavy burdens. If you are weary, this is an invitation to you. It is an invitation to rest.

"What do you want?" It's a good reflective question. But it's not what Jesus is asking here. He's making an offer. It doesn't matter what you want. Jesus isn't trying to negotiate with us based on our wants. He's extending out a hand and saying, "Take this." And the crazy thing is, we don't do it. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." There's this incredible offer on the table. And we don't take it. There's this beautiful music playing and we stay seated. Why don't we take it? Isn't it a free gift after all?

Well, it is free in one sense.

You don't have to purchase it or earn it. But, in another sense, it's not free. It takes up space. The offer on the table is to take up Jesus's yoke. It's an easy yoke. The burden is light. But the yoke is there. A yoke is used to guide animals to work. There is an expectation of things to be done. Let us not forget this is the same Teacher, who a few chapters later, also says, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

You can't have two yokes. You can't walk two ways of life at the same time. If your hand is clenched around something else, you aren't able to take Jesus's hand. And we seem to love our other yokes. Or at least we are deeply attached to them.

What do you want? Well sometimes our actions seem to say we want a heavy burden. We go through a lot of sleepless nights and mental gymnastics to justify staying under yokes that clearly are not of Christ. Paul, in Romans 7 calls it slavery to sin. It's a spiritual affair for him. For many people it is far more physical and tangible. What is it for you? What do you want more than Jesus's yoke? What is making you so weary and with such a heavy burden?

While there is certainly a call for self-reflection here, we also cannot ignore the ways we, both individually and communally, put other people under heavy burdens. It's a mundane example, but last week I was purchasing two books from Amazon because they were on sale. I went to check out and under the shipping options there was the ability to have it there overnight. This was around 4pm. I had the ability for that package to be there between 4am and 8am. Someone would have had to deliver that in the middle of the night. The ways we exist as consumers put heavy yokes on others.

When we find ourselves on the inside, both on the inside of the good life of society and within the inside of the church, this message becomes a call to share that invitation with others. To share the good news. To bring other people into the dance. I am very excited I got to preach on this particular Sunday because it is a Communion Sunday. Jesus sets the invitation, "Come to me." Communion serves as a moment where God calls out and we respond. We are invited to hold open our hand and receive an easy yoke.

And in Communion we find that we are not alone. If I am one in Christ, and you are one in Christ, then we are together. Your heavy burden is a call for me to help ease it. Communion is a radical thing. Christ gives Himself for us. He invites us into not only remembering Him, but being brought into Him and being changed by Him. And all are welcome. The wise and intelligent as well as the infants.

Communion is where we hear Christ say, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." That sounds like something I want. Do you want that?