

The New Normal: A Shoulder to Bear Your Burdens  
Matthew 11:25-30

Today marks the end of our sermon series stemming from the seed planted at Pentecost. We've spent time in the past several weeks discussing the new normal for the church. We are expected to be different. God has made us his holy people, set apart for a purpose. It isn't a choice. It isn't up for discussion. There's no room to delineate from God's plan and will for us. As the church is born in the fire and wind of Pentecost, the world is changed forever. Never has there been such a force for good. Never has there been a global phenomenon like the church that promises so much that it can deliver on. Not because of our power, but because of what Christ has done. We bring that good news of Jesus. We preach Christ crucified. We hope in Christ risen from the dead. We cling to and are heralds of this good news that is needed to permanently fix this world. We bring grace and forgiveness and diversity and identity and a sense of purpose and belonging. We show the world who God is and what He cares deeply about. He so loved the world that He gave his one and only son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. We recognize our need for these things through the stark reality of the Law. We preach this Law to the world not from a bully pulpit but from a position of humility and love so that they may see the great rescue waiting for them in Jesus. This new normal is characterized by all the things that the world so desperately needs right now: mercy, understanding, communion with one another, unconditional love, a perfect standard to live by, and unending forgiveness when we inevitably fail. These things mark the new normal. These things are what we have as the church. These things are what the world needs as it spills out onto the streets from quarantine into protests and riots and anger and frustration and division and pain and anxiety and bitterness. We have the answers. We have the solutions. All centered in Christ. Presented through us, the Church.

As we've walked through Pentecost, we've learned that the new normal is something we can count on but is also something we can offer the world. We need the things offered in and to the church, that's why we are here. Our job as the church is to convince the world that they need it too. They need truth, not an objective truth, not "my" truth, but The Truth. They need true forgiveness, not just a flippant moment of grace, but a perpetual fountain bubbling over with mercy unending. They need belonging, not groups centered around immutable characteristics, but one that depends on the unchanging love of our Heavenly Father. They need Jesus. Plain and simple. They need a savior that isn't themselves, that isn't a system or a rebellion against a system. They need a messiah that can shelter them from oppression, that can right all their injustices, that can repair all that is broken in their lives. They need Jesus Christ because today we hear him speak directly about what he can do for each us. Today, Jesus speaks to us as we are with some of the most comforting and encouraging words in scripture. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

We Christians know this phrase fairly well. I've preached it at several funerals for sainted members of St. Peter. We believe in these words and we cling to them in times of need. The thought behind these words is something like this: I'm tired and Jesus offers me the relief I need. I've fought long enough, let Jesus take these problems off of my shoulders. I have stresses in my life that I have held onto for far too long. I'll let Jesus take them onto his shoulders and I'll exchange them for peace. We think of things we can hold, projects that we manage, pains that we endure. What will happen to my job? What will happen with my family? What will become of me as I get older? We take all of these burdens and we lay them on the shoulders of our savior, Jesus. He asks for them. So we put them there and he takes care of them. That is a wonderful promise that Jesus offers to us in this text. But there is more to it than just that. There is more to the New Normal than just handing over the stresses and anxieties of today. There's more to it than just handing over something because we can hand over problems to a therapist and feel better. We can hand over our problems to an addiction

like drugs or alcohol and get a temporary sense of relief. We can complain about our problems or take them out on others and we'll feel less stressed for a little while. We have coping mechanisms in place in our lives. So does everyone else out there. What makes this offer from Jesus so much better? What makes these words of Jesus so much more promising as we enter into the new normal?

Jesus offers us a shoulder to bear our burdens. It takes a lot for us to admit we need help. It takes a lot for us to finally throw up our hands and admit we have been defeated. Jesus is giving an open invitation to dump every awful thing in our lives, every worry that keeps us up at night, every unfulfilled desire and expectation, every disappointment and disagreement, every sinful act and thought into his lap, onto his mighty shoulders. When I think of this concept of Jesus carrying our burdens, I can't help but think of the shepherd in the parable Jesus tells that leaves the ninety nine to find the one lost sheep. I can't help but recall that image of Jesus seeking out the one sheep. When the shepherd goes to find that sheep he doesn't ask for the sheep's worries or concerns. He doesn't ask for his prayer requests or the things that might be stressing him out. He picks up that sheep, throws it over his shoulders and takes it home. I was thinking too about when we were at the park once with Seth. Of course, when we go anywhere he has his cuppy that he carries. He's got several trains in his hands that need to go on every adventure that he does. We were out and he had all of these things with him when it began to rain. My first instinct wasn't to say, "Here, give me your trains. Give me your cuppy so I can get it all to the car. I'll take care of them." No. My instinct was to grab my son. He was scared as the storm brewed and boomed overhead. My instinct was to pick him up, put him on my shoulders and run to the car.

What do you think our true burden is? Yes, it is the things we face everyday that weigh us down and stress us out. Yes, it is our long list of prayers that seem to grow by the day. Sometimes the burden is just being human. Sometimes the burden is just living in the world and so we don't put things in God's hands or on his shoulders. We put our selves. We throw ourselves onto the shoulders of Christ as a burden for him to carry. I know no-one wants to be seen as a burden. No one ever wants to feel like a burden. Yet, Jesus leaves an open invitation for us to be that. He tenderly invites us to allow ourselves to be completely exposed for who we are. We throw ourselves on the shoulders of Christ because sometimes being human is a burden. We place ourselves onto the broad frame of Jesus because we are the burden as much as we are the burdened.

Sometimes grief is so deep that it affects our entire being and we need to throw ourselves onto the shoulders of Jesus. This is especially true with the things we are afraid to share with other people. We have deep hurts and losses that we've mourned that no one knows about. What do we do? We place our entire, fragile and broken bodies into the arms of Jesus. There's a recognition of sin there. You recognize that yes God, I've been a burden. Yes God, I am burdened. I have been a burden in my sin. God, I have been weighed down so heavily by sin and its effects in this world. My body is burdened. I am a burden. Take me. Take me onto your shoulders. Carry me because I'm lost. I'm wandering. A storm is brewing above me and I don't know where to turn or where to run so just pick me up, hold me close and take me home.

In our country right now we have things going on. People are angry and hurt. Do we place these burdens on the shoulders of Jesus or do we place our entire country there? I think the reason our country is in such disarray is because we're claiming these burdens for ourselves. We're saying that we can fix the problem. That's the American way. Our country is something that only God can fix. Something that only Jesus can heal. So we place our entire society on Jesus' shoulders. It's funny, on Fourth of July weekend we think of our Founding Fathers. We think about the founding principles. We celebrate those things. The documents and actions around our founding are incredible achievements. They created the greatest country to ever exist. The freest country to ever exist. But we don't stand on the shoulders of our forefathers. We lay on the shoulders of our Jesus and as we do that we receive a peace that surpasses all human understanding. Laying there lifeless on the shoulders of Christ is where we find rest.

Our Lord Jesus takes our burdens, he takes us, everything that makes us so heavy, everything that weighs us down. He takes it upon himself and he doesn't just push the problems deep inside. He doesn't suppress the anger, the sin and the rage. He doesn't push it aside. He deals with it. Head on. As he trudges onward toward Calvary with the cross pressing on his shoulders, every sin on him was laid. Every burden bore in his body. What do you think that means for us? When you look at Jesus on the cross bearing every burden, then proclaiming it is finish. When we see Jesus rising again from the dead with no weight on his shoulders at all, just the free gospel of resurrection being spoken by him, being shown in his resurrected body. What does that mean for us? That great exchange in his death and resurrection is bearing our burdens and being made light again. So we see that when we place everything on Jesus he gives us eternal life. He gives us eternal peace. He gives us a promise that resurrection and restoration and eternal fixing is coming.

So you can go ahead and place your burdens on somebody else. You can place them on your own shoulders. You can bury them deep down inside or inflict them on some innocent bystander but whenever you do that there's no great exchange. You just compound the problem. You create more bitterness and anger and anxiety and strife when you do that. The great exchange of burden for peace. The great exchange of death for life only comes in Jesus. As we place not only our sin but our entire selves on Him. Like a shepherd carrying that sheep back to the ninety nine. Like a father protecting his son from the storm. That's what we receive. That's what are given in Jesus and that is something the world desperately needs. You look at anybody out there right now you see burdens. You see stress lines on their faces. You can see how life has hunched them over by the weight of stress and grief and pain.

Come to me all who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Aren't you tired? Come to Jesus and lay not only your problems but your entire self on his shoulders. We can do that. We don't have to fear retribution or judgement from our Heavenly Father. When we do that we are given full acceptance and peace and belonging and joy. When we do that too we show other people that it's possible. We show other people that it's okay to admit that you are a burden. It's okay to admit you are burdened. We are a burden Christ joyfully bore. You don't have to hold onto these things anymore. You don't have to suffer in silence. You don't have to sit in your bitterness. You don't have to plot your own rescue. It all comes in Jesus. It's there in Jesus. As we step out of a life in quarantine, in fear of an invisible virus that threatens and impacts our everyday lives. Don't you think that the world has some fears? Don't you think the world has anxieties? Don't you think the world needs rest? Amen.