



July 5 – Learning

In the time between Iowa State and Luther Seminary, I worked a few different jobs. The first of those was spending around 9 months working in a factory in Albert Lea Minnesota. It is the same company where my Dad was working as an Executive Vice President, functioning as a turnaround specialist. He would often joke that he only worked half days, following it up by saying that he leaves at 5 and returns at 5.

He would drive and I would ride in that small Ford Escort. I felt obligated to help him stay awake, so I kept talking on the drive. He would not say much at all, which led me to talk all the more. Then one day, he firmly stated, “Mike, I love you, but for years this has been my time to pray and I will not let you interrupt that.” In the blink of an eye, I understood so much more about my Dad, and how he navigated the obstacles life had thrown at him.

As we hear this familiar Gospel passage, we are often drawn to verse 28, “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.” We love that passage because it feels like home. There is comfort in knowing that we can go to Jesus when we are weary and tired, which summarizes a lot of people these days. When you ask someone how they are doing, the response is often, “Fine...just busy.” We are looking for a time and place of rest.

This same call is one of the core foundations of this country’s history, as it is said, “Bring me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free.” As we celebrate the first 250 years as a nation, I pray that we can return to such foundation, longing to be a place of healing and reconciliation instead of seeking glory at the expense of others.

As beautiful as verse 28 is, I want to think a little bit about verse 29, which reads, “Take my yolk upon you and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Jesus invites anyone who would listen to take up his yoke. We are not called into a place of complete rest. We are called to take up the work of Jesus by walking alongside. And as we work with Jesus, we are to learn what this looks like.

What is the yoke of Christ? What are we to learn? When you ask church leaders what the work of the church is, it is often talked about in terms of numbers. We look to the number of people in attendance, or how many baptisms, weddings, number of people in education. What are the numbers that show up in the Gospels? There are the 12 disciples. The other numbers are usually about the people Jesus has healed or fed. We do not hear how many showed up for the sermon on the mount. We learn how many were fed in a time of need. We should take notice of this. Our true measure is by the care that we show to the world around us.

That morning in the car changed my life. I was already preparing to go to seminary. I felt called and I was ready to learn. In one sentence, my Dad opened my eyes to what faith looks like, what being a disciple looks like. It is not about what you say or do when people are watching. It is about how you live and how you care for others when nobody is looking. I am still completely humbled by the example that he gave us.

I sometimes wonder when the Church moved from the yoke and teachings of Jesus to a model that places the emphasis on preaching and teaching. Jesus did not tell his disciples to tell the story of his life. He told them to go out into the world and to bring healing. There were sent to let people know that the kingdom of God is here, that God walks with us. He called them to take the other side of the yoke and to work in tandem in the world, to learn about what Jesus values and to accompany others in that journey.

250 years is but a blip on the timeline compared to the God who was expressed love to the world since the start of time. What a joy to know such love. Amen.