

Sermon
July 6, 2008
8 Pentecost, Proper 9 A
The Rev. Carrie Schofield-Broadbent
Whose Yoke Are We Carrying?

After I graduated from college I had the opportunity to go to El Salvador with our diocese to chaperone and interpret for a youth mission trip. Perhaps it goes without saying, but it was an amazing experience. And as so many have said about being in El Salvador, it changed my life.

I wasn't so much surprised that I found myself transformed and changed by the experience, but rather, I hadn't anticipated how I'd be transformed. I thought I'd be overcome by guilt about our material wealth. I thought I'd be swept away by pity and overwhelming compassion for people so poor, and whose lives had been so torn apart by war and violence.

I did change in those ways to a certain extent. It's surreal to compare the material abundance in this country with the poverty of a developing nation. And there's no way I can ever really understand what it's like to live in a country torn by civil war; a country where churches are made of mostly of women, because almost a whole generation of men had been lost to the violence of war.

But, instead of coming out of my El Salvador experience with a feeling of pity for the Salvadorans, I was overcome by amazement. For all the things that struck me about the differences in our countries, my most profound realization is that for as poor as the people there are, for as much as they have to struggle for even the very things I take for granted, their spirit of praise was unmistakable.

In the midst of what we would call poverty, there was an overwhelming sense of abundance, blessing and riches. People gave and gave. Not only did they practice beautiful hospitality, but they were optimistic, hopeful, forgiving, and celebratory.

They had so little, compared to us, in terms of material and economic wealth, but their spiritual wealth was abundant and inspiring.

It made me wonder – how could Salvadorans with so “little” be so inclined toward celebration, when Americans who have comparatively so “much” be so inclined toward negativity, complaining, and stress? I find that now, 10 ½ years later, that question still lingers in my spirit.

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Jesus says, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

In May I had an opportunity to travel back to my alma mater, Virginia Theological Seminary and heard the new Dean and President Ian Markham say this, which continues to pop up in my own prayer life:

‘Jesus said, come to me all you that are weary and heavy laden... for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’ So we must ask ourselves, when we are feeling weary and heavy laden (and we all know what that feels like, right?), maybe we’re carrying another yoke.¹

I wonder -- perhaps it’s our own yokes that we find too heavy and that weary us. Perhaps we’ve picked up something other than the yoke of Christ?

Picking up the yoke of Christ is to work for the kingdom of God; to proclaim the Good News of forgiveness, grace, redemption and love. The yoke of Christ is loving our selves and our neighbors, its feeding the hungry, practicing forgiveness, and welcoming the stranger. The yoke of Christ is praising God and following Jesus.

When we feel burdened and heavy-laden – what yoke have we picked up? Is it the yoke of “success”? Do we strain under the pressure to be perfect? To be successful? To be great? Yea, we may strain under that. It’s a common yoke, but it’s not Jesus’.

Do we feel wearied by the yoke of fear? Fear of change? Fear of failure? Fear of loss? Do we struggle under the weight of fear of change? We probably do from time to time. It’s a pretty popular yoke, but it’s not Jesus’. Jesus’ yoke is not one of fear, but of freedom. Jesus’ yoke does not command us to stay the same; not at all – Jesus’ yoke is one of transformation.

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Why were the Salvadoran people so filled with joy in the midst of poverty while we seem to be so inclined toward stress and complaining in ours?

Perhaps it’s because they, the community of the faithful that I met, had picked up the yoke of Jesus instead of another yoke. I imagine that there are other Salvadorans, whom I did not meet, who have picked up the yoke of victim, aggressor, bitterness, or violence. I’m sure there’s plenty of that to go around for those who choose, but the celebratory, optimistic hopeful people I met, were clearly bearing the yoke of Jesus.

What yoke have we picked up? The other yokes are so tempting here among our riches: the yoke of success, wealth, perfection – but ultimately, if it’s not the yoke of Jesus, it’s just not going to work out well for us in the long run, I’m convinced.

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

¹ May 2008 lecture to “First Three Years” program at VTS. Dean Ian Markham. Loosely quoted from my memory...