

Today's reading comes from the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 11, verses 1-19, and 25-30. Listen for God's word to you this day:

Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message in their cities.

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah<sup>[a]</sup> was doing, he sent word by his<sup>[b]</sup> disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers<sup>[c]</sup> are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone<sup>[d]</sup> dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet?<sup>[e]</sup> Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written,

'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.'

<sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,<sup>[f]</sup> and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came; <sup>14</sup>and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup>Let anyone with ears<sup>[g]</sup> listen!

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

<sup>17</sup>'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; <sup>19</sup>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."<sup>[h]</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 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; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” <sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

This is the word of God for the people of God...thanks be to God.

Chapter 11 starts off just as Jesus has finished the mission discourse that we looked at last week, and has John in prison, sending his disciples to ask if Jesus is in fact the one for whom they have waited. We already know the answer before the question is asked as Matthew calls Jesus the Messiah in verse 2. But, none the less, Jesus responds, giving a list of actions, of works, that he has done that proves he is in fact the one for whom the Jewish community has waited. “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. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” This section sets up what is to come in the rest of the chapter, a critique of those who have not received Jesus or John as prophetic voices in their midst.

As John’s disciples leave to return to him, Jesus turns to the crowd gathered around him, questioning: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.” Jesus, defending

John's place as a prophet among them, makes it clear that the people went to see John, to hear his words, or to gawk at him, it's unclear, but they seem to not have understood what they were looking at or looking for in this man. And, for many it seems they have missed the point of John's ministry entirely. Now, there has been violence against the people, "From the days of John the Baptist," Jesus says, "until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,<sup>18</sup> and the violent take it by force."

In Verse 15 he concludes with a drastic call to action: "Let anyone with ears listen!" Which may seem an obvious call for everyone, since nearly everyone has physical ears, and in the first section of text he has proclaimed his healing of the deaf, but Jesus is not talking about just hearing the words. Seemingly he uses this phrase to make it clear that they have misunderstood, and what they think they understand they do not. And, if it wasn't already clear that they have misunderstood, he is about to make it clear.

Jesus launches in on those who have heard the sounds of joyous celebrations and have not joined in celebrating, and those who have heard the wailing sounds of grief and yet have not stopped to grieve with others, those who have ears, have not heard....Is it just the generation before Jesus, or the generation of Matthew's readers, that are ignoring the sounds of joyous celebration and the wailing of guttural grief or might it also be our generation. Those of us gathered in worship today, who are ignoring those sounds? Do we have ears to hear, and are we hearing?

Jesus says the people who supposedly heard John, who gathered to hear what he had to say, dismissed him, saying, For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'" And these same ones are critical also of Jesus, <sup>19</sup>the Son

of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” These same ones who do not stop to grieve or celebrate, seem to only focus their hearing on points of criticism. The people are not satisfied with the actions of either the prophet or the Christ. They are, as Dr. Lance Pape calls them, like fickle children, constantly changing the rules of the game, wanting more, wanting less, always finding reason for judgement and dismissal of those before them, never clearly hearing. How are we similar?

Pape comments, “Gods ways can be both too little and too much for us...We chafe under John’s unapologetic insistence that a moment of decision is at hand for each of us—that we must examine our hearts, let the chaff burn away, and embrace God’s future with our whole lives. However, Jesus can also rub us the wrong way. In his irrational exuberance he just does not seem to grasp that some people are beyond hope—that we must keep select company in order to keep our lives on an even keel.”<sup>1</sup>

So after Jesus has firmly placed those around him in the category of misunderstanding much about John and Jesus, and not only misunderstanding but dismissing them, he concludes this section in verse 19 with the statement “Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” This verb deeds which is *erga* in greek, is the same as the word used to describe the Messiah in verse 2, when John is sending to find out what the Messiah was doing. Deeds and doing are in fact the works, and wisdom, God’s essence, vindicates the actions, work, deeds, doings, of Christ, while those giving witness to what is happening are filled with judgement and dismissal. The works that

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<sup>1</sup> Pape, Lance. Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 215

bring healing and understanding. The works that bring wisdom to all who hear, remember in verse 6 Jesus said, “and blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” yet he has just spent 4 verses explaining how those who have heard both him and John don’t get what they are about, they don’t believe the very works before them.

So, if those gathered with him seem to not be the ones who are hearing, and the ones who understand, who then will be blessed? Who then does Jesus believe hears what is being said?

Jesus begins praying, 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.”

Similar to our text last week, where Jesus refers to the disciples as little ones, here Jesus refers to those who understand as infants. Recognizing those who do in fact hear, do in fact understand the significance of who Jesus is, as the infants, not the ones in power, not the ones with authority, not the ones with perceived wisdom and intelligence. These words are not to be taken lightly, Jesus is speaking directly to the people he has come to serve and Matthew is reiterating that message in his writings inviting his community to find hope in Jesus of Nazareth.

Matthews community was most likely a community made of people on the margins, people who had been cast out, and dismissed, similar to John and Jesus, disciples in the making who were being invited to follow a man killed for his prophetic teaching,

who also touted the teachings of another prophet killed for the same reason.<sup>2</sup> So their hearing of this message, of Jesus speaking to the infants would have spoken directly to their hearts, to their very being.

So then just as Jesus is praying, he turns toward the crowd, to those who can hear, to the infants, and says: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Those in Jesus’ generation, those in Matthews community, needed a yoke that would lighten the burden of being unwelcome and cast aside, they needed a yoke that brought peace, they needed to believe in a savior that was gentle and humble in heart, where they would find rest for their souls because the powers that be were giving them quite the opposite. And, isn’t the same true today? Aren’t there any number of people in our community who need Jesus to bring rest?

The easy yoke doesn’t solve our problems, it never has, instead it gives us purpose. Dr. Pape reminds us that, “The easy yoke means having something to do: a purpose that demands your all and summons forth your best. It means work that is motivated by a passionate desire to see God’s kingdom realized. It means work toward a certain future in which all of God’s dreams will finally come true. To accept

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<sup>2</sup> Park, Eugene Eung-Chun, Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 217

the yoke of the gentle and humble Lord is to embrace the worthy task that puts the soul at ease.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is inviting us to find purpose in him, to find the ease of a purpose that is greater than ourselves to dance in celebration and wail in lament, to bring about God’s kingdom in our midst. The question for us is: do we have ears to listen?

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<sup>3</sup> Pape, Lance. Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011, 217.