

## Three-Legged Race

July 6, 2008

(Pentecost 8 - Year A)

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

When I was in elementary school, one of the highlights of the school year was a day called "Field Day."

Field Day was always held during the month of April and each grade level competed in a different race.

Some of the races were traditional relay races.

One of the races was a potato sack race.

One of the races involved the teachers dressed up in silly costumes.

And, one of the races that always took place on Field Day was a three-legged race.

In a 3-legged race, you are paired up with a partner.

And you and your partner stand side-by-side.

Then, your left leg and your partner's right leg are tied together with a rope.

Then, it's off to the finish line, trying to run as fast as you can with your middle two legs tied together.

Invariably, a pair of kids would not be able to work together with their partner - and both of them would trip and fall flat on their face.

However, the pair of kids that usually won the three-legged race were the kids who learned how to work their legs in sync, the kids who were not burdened by the rope that tied them together.

The kids who won the 3-legged race were the ones who were yoked together as a well-partnered team.

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 my yoke is easy

And my burden is light."

Those of us who have been yoked to Jesus in our baptism know that running with Jesus in the three-legged race of life can certainly *not*

be described as easy.

Being yoked to Jesus through baptism involves hard sacrifices, hard decisions and hard sufferings.

However, when Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew that his yoke is easy, he does not mean 'easy' as in the sense of being 'not difficult.'

Jesus means that his yoke, his rope that binds our leg to his, does not fit poorly or does not chafe us.

Instead, Jesus' yoke fits us very well.

When we are yoked to Jesus, we run together in sync, for Jesus is gentle and humble in heart.

And Jesus says:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens...

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...

For my yoke is easy

And my burden is light."

In the days when Jesus lived on this earth, a yoke not only meant a piece of wood that yoked or bound two oxen or beasts of burden together.

In Jesus' time, a yoke was another name for the Law.

The Hebrew law involved hundreds and hundreds of burdensome rules and regulations.

Yet, Jesus issues an invitation to all of us, saying:

"Come to me, all you who are burdened by legalistic rules and regulations.

Come and put on a new and different yoke."

Rather than to tie ourselves to the leg of empty rituals and rules,

Rather than to put on the yoke of the law,

Jesus invites us to put on the yoke of love.

When folks first come into the Episcopal Church, I tend to hear a lot of questions that indicate to me that people think that living as an Episcopalian, or living as a Christian for that matter, means putting on the yoke of the law.

I get asked questions - questions which I certainly do not mind answering - but questions such as:

Do I supposed to cross myself during the worship service?  
Or, in what order are the candles on the altar supposed to be lit?  
Or, is it okay to just sit in my pew instead of to kneel?

My answer to all of those questions about rules is to explain the reasons *why* people decide to worship God in particular ways,  
And then to tell you to worship God in whatever way *you believe* glorifies God.

Living as a Christian, especially living as a Christian of the Episcopalian flavor, has nothing whatsoever to do with putting on the yoke of the law.

Living as a Christian has everything to do with putting on the yoke of love.

Therefore, what *really* jazzes me up is when I get questions from you that show that you have put on the yoke of love and that you have tied your leg onto Jesus' leg.

I become energized when I hear questions from you such as:  
Would it be alright if I took the altar flowers to a friend of mine who is in the hospital?

Or, can you say a prayer with me for a kid that I know who is being bullied at school?

Or, do you know of any homebound folks that I could go and visit this week?

That yoke - the yoke of love and of service to others - certainly involves a lot more work and involvement than worrying about what order the altar candles are lit.

The yoke of love is difficult and a lot of work and takes extra time and effort.

However, Jesus' yoke of love is easy because it fits us perfectly and it enables us to run in sync with Jesus, side by side, step by step, without tripping and falling on our face.

However, we are not only burdened by the yoke of the law within the context of the Church.

We are burdened by the yoke of the law in our everyday lives, as well.

The yoke of the law tells us that the toilet paper roll should be put on just the right way - which, of course, is over the top of the roll.  
The yoke of the law tells us that we should never, ever, talk to strangers.  
The yoke of the law tells us that we should pursue happiness through the acquisition of bigger houses and better cars and fatter wallets.  
The yoke of the law tells us that we should lock our car doors when driving through East Waco.

Yet, Jesus issues an invitation to all of us, saying:  
“Come to me, all you who are burdened by your own rules and regulations.  
Come to me, and put on a new and different yoke.”

For when we tie our leg onto Jesus at this baptismal font,  
Jesus will take us, side by side, to talk with strangers, where we will be transformed by people who are the most different from us.  
Jesus will take us, step by step, to empty our wallets and to sell our possessions and to give to the poor.  
Jesus will take us, side by side, into East Waco, where we will make new friends.  
Jesus will take us, side by side, step by step, up a hill, onto a cross and into eternal life.

For Jesus says to you and to me:  
“Come to me, all you that are weary and burdened by law.  
Take my yoke of love upon you and be my partner in the three-legged race.”

For his yoke is easy,  
His burden is light,  
And his law...is love.  
AMEN.

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