

Pentecost VI

Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

¹⁶“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ¹⁷“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the 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.”

²⁵At 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; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All 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. ²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Here what comfortable words our Savior Christ saith unto all who turn to him: (quote above verse)

Matthew 11 is pretty full, and I wanna get it right before I fall lightly upon the closing verses, which are among Jesus’ sweetest words to us. But what does Matthew tell us before??

Well...he tells us of doubt and unbelief in the presence of miracles.

In the opening verses, it’s an imprisoned John the Baptist sending his disciples with a question for Jesus, and every once in a while, Jesus answers a question. To the John who shall never see the light of day again, Jesus gives his answer, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy^l are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. ⁶Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

John is not rebuked, and therefore neither are we. Let’s come back to that.

The section omitted from the lectionary today is Jesus’ condemnation of the towns in which most of his miracles have been performed, and yet Jesus has been rejected. Chorazin. Bethsaida. He says that the Gentiles towns of Tyre and Sidon will have a fare far better than they.

Our lectionary then picks back up with his comments on the Father.

So let me put this back together before I make a few personal reflections:

1. John the Baptist's vindication as he stares death in the face includes this: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.' ¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon';¹⁹the 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."
 - a. You've been with a child before. You've had the moments. You've been with an adult for that matter. The punch was too sweet, the funeral was too long. I didn't get invited to this party. But I don't want to go to that party. I hate math. But I do want to get rich in the markets...which involve math. You can't win. John was an ascetic—we don't like it. Too much fasting. Jesus partied with the prostitutes—we don't like it. Wrong crowd. Dad-gummed if we do. Dad-gummed if we don't.
 - b. The absence of gratitude whatsoever for anything leaves you in a precarious spiritual state, you might say. Woe to you. Woe to you who can receive nothing from the hand of the Lord who loves you. But John the Baptist is not in his sights when saying this. John just needed a word of comfort. It's Chorazin in his sights. It's not even the pagans of Tyre. It's the ungrateful and indifferent. It's those who see the miracle and get angry, gossipy, and malicious with the outcome. It's me. Was it really a miracle? Does that crowd even deserve the miracle? I've seen how he treats his kids. Where's my miracle?
2. Jesus speaks of the Father. And of children. This has me on the edge of my seat, because I am heavy-laden at times. I have a very reactive spirit (did you see me last month?). Whatever it is that we need to know about the grandeur of God is best understood by infants (and not the spoiled children earlier in the chapter). Ezra this week, "God answered our prayers." He saw it. He offered no other qualifier. And my soul stands in judgment. Lord help my unbelief. The eyes of the heart are permeable with regard to the spiritual and physical world. It is predisposed to see the two working in perfect harmony. It takes years of adulting to cover that up. Years of hedging; years of maintaining a persona; years of bifurcating; years of self-justification; years of lying. I want to go to a party. I don't want to go to that party. Here it is, friends.

Jesus came to give rest. To a culture driven by anxiety, mental-exhaustion, fear-mongering, and shame. We have whole industries that can help you bury each one in activity. Or, you can rest. That rest will sometimes come jarringly into your life through a miracle. Man, do things come into focus after a dynamic interface with the Almighty. Suddenly at the lowest hour of our psychological brink, we declare a feast. That's Gospel. At other times, shame breaks the dishes at the party, and the same Almighty grants us a point to walk away—we call it fasting. And you're free. We get JTB and Jesus every day. Sin is real, and in my life it's most often ingratitude for the whole mess. I shut down two weeks ago. Couldn't bear it. And then I was given a gift. Rest.

At this altar, the Father, who dwells in the Son is fully offered to us through the Son! You get all of God. He has an answer for you. Everything has been handed over to Jesus by the Father, and it is here that you receive that most fully. You want a burden to obsess over? Here it is! Burden away—it's an easy one. It is rest. Need a yoke? A purpose beyond? Jesus was yoked to a cross for you, so that you can now be yoked to rest. Comfortable words become comfortable sacraments of grace in this life. All of life is now a gift. "Lord you have freely given us everything through our Lord Jesus Christ; grant us now but one thing more—ever grateful hearts."

In the name...