

Sermon: **Let God Be God**
Text: Matthew 11:16-19; 25-30

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I had to buy a new telephone this past week. In a very large section in the center of the Best Buy store were counters full of cell phones and blackberries of every brand, and every sort of hi-tech communication device. Sensing my bewilderment, a friendly clerk asked if he could help me. I told him that all I wanted was a telephone. I didn't need something that would take pictures or play music or connect to the internet. Just a telephone, ya' know, like a walkie-talkie or a tin can with a string.

"Oh" he says, "you mean like a regular telephone?" "That's the idea", I said. "Well yes", he said, "We still have some of those... over there in the corner along the back wall."

I found them, way over there in the corner along the back wall. There was another guy already there trying to make sense out of all the technical stuff written on the boxes. He couldn't understand it and he was a medical doctor. All the phones there were the cordless type and most of them were systems of phones with several receivers so you can place them throughout your home and use them as an intercom and transfer calls from one room to the next... like big business.

Once was, you had 12 buttons with numbers on them. All you had to do was punch in a few numbers and wait to hear somebody say "hello". Now there are all sorts of additional buttons for all sorts of additional functions. And I'm just trying to buy a telephone here, thank you. What do they mean, "Can you hear me now?" After all these years since Alexander Graham Bell, that's been the basic idea, hasn't it?

The other guy asked me what I knew about these cordless phones. "Well", I said, "I understand that you have to get the kind that won't interfere with your wireless internet connection if you have one, and I hear that there are some concerns about security. I guess that's what some of these numbers are about."

We both got to laughing about all this, and we spent some time exchanging cynical remarks about all the gadgetry on these things. How is it that all these wonderful inventions and commodities, designed to make life easier and lighter and sold for our convenience and comfort can be so complicated and overwhelming and downright intimidating?

Finally a clerk came along. I don't think he knew much more than we did. About all he could do was point to one particular phone and say, "I think this one is probably the best deal." So I picked up one of them and looked at it more closely. The other guy said, "Is that the one you're going to buy?" I shrugged my shoulders and replied, "I guess so." He said, "I guess I'll get that one too." Brilliant decisions!

When I got to the check-out, he was right ahead of me in the line. After he had checked out, he looked back at me with a grin and said, "Hey, if you ever get that thing to work, call me and let me know how you did it."

Well, we were both having some fun. I'm sure that neither of us was as dumb as we were letting on, and believe me, I'm glad for every technical convenience I can get. But it is ironic and a little crazy, isn't it, that all our convenience and efficiency machines can become so overwhelming and intimidating.

More seriously, it was a frequent complaint of Jesus' in his generation, that the scribes and Pharisees and the interpreters of the moral law of God had so complicated it all, making it difficult to follow. It became a burden rather than a guide to living, to the extent that it was more of a stumbling block than helpful. Jesus said, "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them."

When you're tired and frustrated... I mean morally tired... intimidated by all the complexities and hassles of religion and the complicated interpretations and expectations; burdened, and feeling condemned to failure by all the standards and rules and regulations; it's hard to care. You begin to feel intimidated not only by external expectations and demands, but

by internal struggles of guilt and failure. It's a struggle described so vividly by Paul when he says, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." He says that the moral laws of God are good and right, but he keeps beating himself up trying to obey them all till it becomes an inward struggle with himself and his own sinful inclinations.

When you feel beaten down like that you get weary of it all and it's hard to care. You begin to withdraw and pull into yourself. You can easily become cynical and completely unresponsive to everything religious. What to think... what to believe? All you want is... what you want, but you don't quite know what it is you want.

Jesus says we become like spoiled little children who refuse to be satisfied. You don't want to play wedding. When we play the flute for you, you won't dance. You don't want to play funeral. When we wail, you won't mourn. When John the Baptist came, not eating or drinking, with a stern message, you say he has a demon. When Jesus comes, eating and drinking and connecting with hurting people, you say he's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. John is too austere and non-sociable. Jesus is too sociable. John is too harsh; Jesus is too soft. John is too exclusive; Jesus is too inclusive.

It seems that the wiser we think we are about all this and the more sophisticated and self-sufficient we think we are; the harder it is for us to hear the wisdom of God and to be receptive to his grace.

Weary and burdened down. Anybody in the house know the feeling?

Jesus says, "To what will I compare this generation...his? To what would Jesus compare *this* generation... ours? Children who won't play; unresponsive to every call, be it to dance or to mourn. Unresponsive to any and every call of religion. Too social oriented; not social enough. Too harsh; too soft. Too exclusive; too inclusive.

The religious landscape of our generation has indeed become complex and confusing. It is hard to know what to believe. We are easily intimidated by everyone else's certitude and their insistence that we be certain of what they are so certain. We're not sure when to feel guilty, or for what, if at all. And we get frustrated and weary of it all. It's hard to care, so we get cynical and we withdraw and become unresponsive and numb to it all. All we want is ... what we want, but we don't quite know what it is we want. We become like those children who refuse to be satisfied. We pull into ourselves and call it "spirituality"... disconnected from any tradition or community.

But then comes this comforting invitation of Jesus:

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.

Simple... clear... clean... and so profound. It's not technical; it's relational. Jesus' invitation to himself often shines most brightly into our misunderstanding and confusion. "Come to me, you who are weary... morally weary... weary of religious confusion... under heavy loads of rules and regulations and formulas and systems. You who have so complicated the way and the truth and the life. Come to me. I will give you rest... rest for your souls."

I love the old liturgy that reads:

Hear what comfortable words our Savior Christ saith unto all who truly turn to him. "Come unto me all that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

What comfortable words! "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. My yoke is easy and my burden is light." They are comfortable words, indeed!

Now before you all lean back on your recliners, let me assure you that Jesus is *not* saying, "All you slackers who are looking for a shortcut without accountability, come to me. I'm easy. This will be a piece of cake." This is not an invitation to passivity. It is an invitation to his grace and to the freedom of his forgiveness.

Before you jump at the opportunity for a quick-fix for all your problems, let me remind you that this is not your invitation to Jesus to come work for you on your terms, to your satisfaction. This is his gracious invitation for you to come to him; for you to crawl out from under the heavy, poor-fitting yoke of self-determination as you pull yourself along under an ever-increasing burden on an unending moral slog. This is his invitation to take his yoke upon you. His yoke is “easy”. The literal Greek word is “kind”, “suitable”, one that is carefully shaped for minimum chafing and one that distributes the load. His yoke is kind to us and perfectly suited to us.

Jesus may have been referring to a double yoke commonly placed over a team of two oxen. “Join me as your yoke-mate. Learn from me. Let me pull with you. Let me lead you. Come to me as the way and the truth and the life. Let me be who I came to be.”

It’s often been said, “Let God be God.” That may sound a bit simplistic and cliché, but it is a very profound faith response to God, and it is often the answer to our complications and confusions. Let God be God.

That was hard for Jesus’ generation. That’s hard for our generation too, isn’t it. We stumble all over grace and the freedom of forgiveness.

Let God be God, on God’s own terms. Crawl out from under your yoke that burdens and defeats you, and rise up under the yoke of Christ that is so kindly suited to you, and begin to feel the surge ahead as you live and work in cooperation with him in his way; according to his truth; and in the vitality of his life. Know the joyful, satisfying rest of soul; no longer intimidated by guilt, but motivated by love; no longer cynical, but thankful... at rest in your soul.

Hear the comfortable words of Jesus:

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.

Amen.