

Peter Bankson: The Marvelous Mystery of the Easy Yoke

Seekers Church: A Christian Community

In the Tradition of the Church of the Saviour

Peter Bankson

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The Marvelous Mystery of the Easy Yoke

Scripture

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

(Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30)

“And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done (to follow God’s instructions in selecting a wife for Isaac.) Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”

(Genesis 24:58-67)

“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

(Romans 7:15-17)

Introduction

This morning I want to raise up three lessons from our Scripture lessons for this week:

1. It is easier to complain out of prejudice than it is to learn from experience.
2. It is harder than I think to do what I want to do, or what I ought, to do.
3. It is a paradox, but Christ calls us to find our peace through following God’s call.

I can see how each of them speaks to us on this day before Independence Day, as we gather to celebrate our dependence on God and our community, knit together through communion.

It is easier to complain out of prejudice than it is to learn from experience.

Our Gospel lesson begins in the middle of a sermon by Jesus. He'd been telling his followers that "... no one born of women is greater than John the Baptist." "... if you are willing to accept it, he (that is John the Baptist) is the Elijah who is to come. Let anyone with ears listen!" But Jesus' frustration in our Gospel lesson tells us that many of his day weren't able to listen: "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'he has a demon'; 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." Like the people of Jesus' day, it isn't easy to open ourselves to a truth that's new and different.

Last Sunday I heard Phil Porter calling us to reach out for understanding even when that means we need to hold our own judgment lightly and be willing to be changed by conversation – by communion. Phil offered us what InterPlayers know as a "whole body story," a form that calls on movement to uncover the truth that lies in us below the level of our conscious patterns.

For many who were with us, Phil's active wrestling with judgment and learning offered a fresh approach to the Word. But some felt that it was more of a performance than the kind of sermon that is typically offered here. Others among us missed the opportunity to clearly celebrate our first anniversary here as part of our time of worship, a time to

remind ourselves of our last worship at 2025, of the long, hot march from there to here with Andy and others carrying the cross, and Jeffrey carrying the banner, of the way we blessed each room of this place for ministry by anointing the small crosses we'd made and placed all over the building. It had been a long journey getting to that long march, and we don't want to lose our memories of that time. We all know how to celebrate an anniversary, and for some, last Sunday didn't fit the mold.

When I am threatened by something new it is easy to cling for stability and comfort to what I **know**. What I **know** has been good enough to get me to this place. And this is a **good** place, right? So if I never waver from what I know, I'm being faithful, right? Right?

Maybe not. The longer I sit with surprise, uncertainty and fear, both here and out there, the more I've come to see that God is on the move, creating something fresh in each new day. Jesus came to show us something new, and when the Holy Spirit came, as Jesus promised, the world we knew became the new we know. Yesterday; today; tomorrow. Bob Dylan got it right: "The times, they are a changin'." And I believe God is in those changes, even when I can't see it yet.

Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. We learn from our relationships with each other and in the wider world. As we gather here as one body, in this circle of knowing, believing, rejoicing, being, God gives us the opportunity to set down our firm beliefs so will have ears to listen. If I can do that, I may learn from my experience that what I thought was righteous judgment has become prejudice. Then I have a God-given opportunity for growth.

Which leads me to the second lesson from our lessons for this week:

It is harder than I think to do what I want to do, or what I ought, to do.

Next week will mark the end of a year of retirement for me. Back when I was running from meeting to meeting, trying to keep the funding flowing into Communities In Schools, and we were just getting settled here in our new place – back then when ‘retirement’ was a fuzzy vision of energetic days spent working in my studio or riding my bike on quiet country roads – back then I **knew** what I wanted to do. I wanted to find my voice and let go of the bothersome little stuff that had been getting in the way.

I can empathize with Paul: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” It’s not that I’ve spent this last year doing “bad” things. And it’s not that many of you have not been gently and lovingly encouraging me to stop working so hard and spend more time in my studio.

I’m learning that those inner voices that have filled my days with new kinds of meetings and new lists of things that need to be done are not evil spirits. They are calling me to work that is ‘good work’ when I look at it from a larger perspective. I’m beginning to ask something different from Paul’s well-worn lament that he is drawn to do the very things he hates.

What Paul has to say about being drawn by a hunger for pleasure into activities that are sinful not wholesome is still true, still worth holding prayerfully. But what if what I want to do really isn't where I am called to be. And what if God's call on my life is changing?

There's a new TV ad playing – about callings. I saw it during the Wimbledon matches yesterday. It shows some middle-aged guy selling his old car restoration business so he can follow a new calling. And when the buyer of the business arrives, it's some middle-aged guy who is excited to have found his new calling in the business the seller is setting down. The ad ends with the line: "Maybe you'll hear a second calling – find a new future."

In this community I've learned that God's call changes. And I've seen how making the changes that we need to make to follow that call takes time – time and support and love from those around us. When we gather here around this table to celebrate Communion we stand around a symbol of God's changing call. The table was made by John Schultz, an extraordinary woodworker who found that new calling after a career at the Office of Personnel Management. He had a bit of help from our Growing Edge fund to buy his first lathe, and a support group from Seekers Church to help him take his woodworking seriously.

Part of the dilemma in Paul's lament about how hard it is to do what we want to do is in knowing what we want to do. And for that discernment, a community is a big help. When we gather in a circle here, around this communion table, we know ourselves as a community that can be there for each other as we grow and change.

That sense of changing call points to the third lesson I want to lift up from our lessons this week:

It is a paradox, but Christ calls us to find our peace through following God's call.

We know it all too well: "Come to me, all you who 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."

For some, that has come to mean "follow your bliss and you will find the Divine." I hear that a lot from 'New Age' gurus who are looking for a spiritual victory without much spiritual practice: "If it feels good, do it."

Others focus on the "yoke" and "burden" part. They are certain that the pain of the work is the one true measure of how godly it is. For me the challenge in this pain-centered approach is that Jesus' promise is missing: "Come to me ... and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you ... and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'" Where's the 'rest' if the measure of faith is the level of pain?

I'm trying on a slight twist on the New Age lesson. It's not "follow your bliss and you will find the Divine" but rather

“Follow the Divine and you will find your bliss.” For me, that means trying to discern what God is calling me to at **this** time, in **this** place; then living into it wholeheartedly, with some accountability; and watching my ‘bliss-0-meter’ to see if the yoke is getting easier and the burden is getting lighter. And if it’s not, that is a sign that I need to do some deeper discerning.

This takes a little help from my friends, and I give thanks to God that this community, gathered around this table, is for me a place where I know most deeply that I belong to God.

Christ invites everyone to eat the bread of life, to drink the cup of the new covenant. We may come to Communion with different understandings of what it is, but my hope is that we can all claim the truth of what it means: “Here we celebrate God’s presence among us, united in Christ’s spirit, broken and whole all at once.”

Summary

So, here are three lessons that I’m taking from the Scripture lessons for this week:

1. It is easier to complain out of prejudice than it is to learn from experience.
2. It is harder than I think to do what I want to do, or what I ought, to do.
3. It is a paradox, but Christ calls us to find our peace through following God’s call.

I can see how each of these lessons speaks to me. As we gather

around our table of remembrance to celebrate our dependence on God, I invite your prayerful reflection on how these lessons speak to you, from your heart.

Amen.