

Worship for March 3, 2024  
Third Sunday in Lent

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Lenten Reading Bonnie Draper and Nancy McIntosh

Reader 1: Friends, once again we invite you to observe a holy Lent-by prayer and fasting, reading and meditating on the Word of God, by acts of service done in Jesus' name.

On this third Sunday in Lent, we see Jesus in an unexpected way. We witness him overturning the tables of the money changers at the temple. His actions surprise us. Yet, in our lives and in our world, we find much that needs to be overturned and driven out that the kingdom of God may be more fully revealed.

Reader 2: In John 2:13-22 we read this account.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple, he found people selling cattle, sheep, doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Prayer

**Merciful God, in Christ you make all things new. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

\*Hymn 475 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Prayer of Confession

**Holy God, you have called us to love you  
with heart, mind, soul, and strength,  
and to love our neighbors as ourselves.  
But, if we are honest, we know**

**that sometimes we hurt each other and fail to keep our promises to you.  
Forgive us, God of grace.  
Teach us, day by day,  
to turn away from what is wrong  
and to turn to you in faith,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Hymn 698     Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness  
Hear the good news:  
We are dead to sin and evil  
and alive to God in Jesus Christ.  
Friends, I urge you to walk in his light- forgiven, reconciled, and free!

Old Testament Reading     Exodus 20:1-20

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading     John 2:13-25  
Morning Message

William Barclay interprets the words of this passage a little differently:  
“Come to me, all you who are exhausted and weighted down beneath your burdens, and I will give you rest.”

In this text, Jesus is speaking to people who were desperately trying to find God, desperately trying to be good, and who were finding the tasks impossible. They were worn out and driven to fatigue and despair.

So, when Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are exhausted, he is speaking to people trying to be faithful Jews in that day, keeping all the laws, rules, and obligations laid upon them. This practice was known as “the yoke of the Pharisees,” the burdensome yoke of self-righteousness and legalistic law-keeping.

According to biblical scholarship, the Pharisees had added over 600 regulations to the proper observance of not working on the Sabbath. Working on the Sabbath is prohibited according to the Law, the Decalogue, what we call the Ten Commandments.

So, we can easily see why a person would find their faith less joy and more burden under this system. It was impossible to adhere to such a complicated system. Jesus has come to change the system and he invites everyone to join him.

In *The Message*, the Bible interpreted by Eugene Peterson, we hear it this way:

“Are you tired? Are you worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me. And you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

I could respond to an invitation like that. It’s hopeful. It’s winsome.

For the religious orthodox, being a faithful Jew was a real burden. It was oppressive. We can look back with the help of social science and see that the goal of a rigid rule system is to establish control over a group of people. The Pharisees maintained control and wielded power because they made the rules.

Jesus said of them, “They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to the bone, and lay them on men’s shoulders.” For the Jews, religion was a life of rule-keeping that affected every aspect of their lives. Barclay says they had to listen for the voice that continually said, “Thou shalt not.”

The rabbis were aware of this oppression. There is a poignant story that illustrates the tragedy of the system: ( Page 18, *The Gospel of Matthew*, William Barclay, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.)

The yoke of Jesus is different. It is his desire that we take his yoke upon ourselves. There is a legend that, as a carpenter, Jesus would make yokes for beasts of burden, ox yokes in particular. A yoke had to be custom-made for an animal. The animal was brought to the shop. Measurements were taken. The yoke was roughed out. Then there was a second fitting. Adjustments were made. It had to be smooth so as not to hurt the animal which would enable him to labor effectively.

The legend goes that Jesus made the best ox-yokes around. In that day, as well as ours, a sign would hang over a shop, identifying the nature of the service or business. Over Jesus’ shop, a sign read, “My yokes fit well.”

What does Jesus want for his followers, for those called by his name? let’s try this on for size: “My yoke fits well. The life I give you is not a burden to gall you. Your task, your life, is tailor-made for you. In this life, find joy. Find fulfillment. Find peace.”

The rabbis used to say, “My burden has become my song.”

We all have burdens. Work that is hard, but necessary. It's not always physical labor. Sometimes the burden is a deeply emotional one.

Anyone who has walked the long road of chronic illness with a loved one knows what it is to carry a burden. We lost a family member a few days ago. She was spiritually ready to die, but, she has grandchildren 2 and 6 years old. She would have loved more time to enjoy them and her other family members. In those final hours, her husband spoke of her goodness and how she relieved the burden he had carried all his life. He said she was a good woman and up until the day he met her, he hadn't been around many good people. They were married 43 years.

The Christian's burden, or work, is simply to love God and love others. This is grace. It is then that our burden becomes a song.

There is an old story in which a man comes upon two children. A little boy carrying an even smaller boy, who was lame, on his back. The man said to the child, "That's a heavy burden for you to carry."

And the little boy responded, "That's not a burden, sir, that's my wee brother."

May all your burdens be given and borne in love, and may they all be carried like a wee brother.

\*Hymn 168 Within Your Shelter, Loving God

\*Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

\*Hymn 607 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Thank you, Lord, for your many gifts-for the world's helpers, peace and security, recreation and rest, friends and family, life and health.**

**We thank you for your Son, Jesus, who came to embody your love and compassion for the world, calling us into lives of joyful service. We offer these gifts in his name. Amen.**

\*Hymn 443 There Is a Redeemer

\*Blessing

May God bless you and keep you safe.

May God smile on you with grace.

May God watch over you always

and give you peace. Amen.

\*Postlude