

“PUT ON THE YOKE OF CHRIST”  
Psalm 46:1-11, Romans 7:15-25, Matthew 11:25-30  
July 4 & 5, 2020

Introduction of Communion with preparation of the elements for later in the service.

For the last 4 months, and possibly into the unforeseen future, we have been seeing drastic changes to our **World’s Condition. Since March** of this year our world has been turned up-side-down with a **pandemic of a corona virus** of unknown origin, going globally after making itself present back in November of 2019. Over 500,000 people have died and over 10 million people have had the disease.

In order to try to prevent the spread of the disease, countries decided to isolate the populations to their own homes, saying it was “safer at home” than to be out and about doing daily business. Military and police forces have been used in some countries to prevent the people from being in the streets except for essential business. Once busy streets and avenues were desolate, empty of almost all traffic. People have been fearfully discontinuing all activities in order to try to keep from contracting the virus. Public schools suddenly became home schooling programs, with sports, concerts, graduations and other activities suddenly discontinued or cancelled.

The TV news and other media have reported on the virus since day one and there have been projections, calculations and predictions made daily as to what will happen, causing all kinds of confusion. State and country leaders have moved from one mindset to another, making decisions that have complicated and exacerbated the situation. Tensions rose, protests took place, people have rebelled against the “safer at home orders,” rejected the “wear your masks” mandates and demanded to be allowed to make their own decisions rather than be told what to do by political leaders. And the media has eaten it up and gleefully reported every nuance of the situation, daily droning of how many more have died, rather than how many have recovered.

Since people were ordered to stay at home, hundreds of thousands of people have become suddenly unemployed, and creating much more chaos at home. And if they were allowed to work from home, families suddenly found themselves confined in house 24/7. Sadly, for many, domestic abuse and

violence has increased exponentially as they tried to figure out what to do with their time and new surroundings. Many were not prepared to have the children or spouse home so much.

Along with the virus pandemic has come **political unrest** throughout the country. Democrats and Republicans have been attacking each other, making accusations of one sort or another, pushing hard to achieve their own agendas, and desperately seeking control of the nation for their own party. States have rebelled against the national government to do things their own way according to how they see it or want it. Criticism is rampant; the Constitution is being undone a little at a time; and the Supreme Court is overreaching their authority, making decisions that should be made in Congress.

And right along with the virus pandemic and the political unrest came **civil unrest** throughout the country. Violence and arson and murder are taking place, decrying a variety of injustices and inequality. Rebellions have emerged seeking autonomous groups and regions. We are finding ourselves becoming divided by factions and separations caused by differences in opinion, differences in ethnic heritage, differences in economic station, and differences in religious understandings. It feels like the United States of America is heading toward civil war, if we're not there already.

So where do we turn to find hope in the midst of this chaos and confusion? **Where can we find hope?** You won't find it in the pages of the *New York Times*! You won't see it from the news casts of ABC, NBC, CBS or CNN! Unfortunately, the one place where we can find hope has been deemed, non-essential by many. But the one place where we can find hope and peace and confidence is in God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Look at **Psalm 46** with me. Here in this chapter we are told that "God Is With Us!" "God is our shelter and strength..." (46:1). He is the One that we can turn to for protection and encouragement. He is the One who knows all that is going on. He is the One that knows our fears and our worries. As God is the Creator of the universe, He has all knowledge, all authority, all power, and all wisdom. When we turn to Him and trust in Him, He shelters us "under His wings" (Ps. 91:4) like a mother pheasant covers her chicks. He becomes our shield of protection against the dangers and evils of this world. He is

“*always ready to help [us] in times of trouble.*” (46:1). And He has the power and authority to back up His protection, to bring all those who trust in Him into safety and security.

With God with us, then, we do not need to be afraid, even if the world around us rages and storms and falls into chaos and confusion. Just like the baby elephant cozies up beside her massive mama and papa when the lion comes prowling, looking for something to eat, so we can call upon the name of the Lord our God and find peace and rest and hope and life, even if violence is all around us. Who is able to stand before Lord our God and do us harm when we have Him as our shelter and strength? He gives us the confidence we need to stand strong in the face of all of the things of this world

And since “*The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge*” (46:7). With God as our refuge, we can run to Him to hide from the dangers and toils and snares of the world. Like the fortified structure that stands strong in the face of the attacking enemy, so God is able to protect us and provide safety for us against the attacks of those in our world who desire to harm us. Like the harbor provides sanctuary to the ship from the raging waves of the storm, so God shelters us from those who seek to destroy us.

And it is not just back in the days of King David that God protects His own people. David calls us to “*come and see what the Lord has done. See what amazing things He has done on earth*” (46:8). God delivers His people from the enemies of this world when we turn to Him and trust in Him and follow His ways. God is ready to come to our help and provide us with the shelter we need so that we might prosper under His care.

So David tells us about God’s wishes for us; “*Stop fighting,*” he says, “*and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme over the world*” (46:10). God desires that we let go of our own understanding, our own strength, our own wisdom and knowledge, and turn to Him so that by recognizing His power and authority, we might find His ability to care for us and protect us and guide us, even in the midst of chaos and confusion; even in times of threat of destruction and violence! “*The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge!*” (46:11).

But even though the world may be raging all around us, we have another battle to be concerned about - the battle that is raging on within us, **between flesh and spirit**. The Apostle Paul explains it very well in Romans 7:15-25.

With Paul we can easily say, "*I do not understand what I do; for I don't do what I would like to do, but instead I do what I hate*" (7:15). When we are faced with the stress and chaos of this world, we often respond in ways that we know are wrong. When someone disagrees with us, we often go to the mat to make our point victorious. When we are confronted by the wrong in our life, we give it our all to rationalize the stuff we do rather than submit and acknowledge our sin. When someone does something against us that hurts, our first response is to want to get back at them through some sort of retaliation, be it verbally or actionably. We know that one wrong deed often leads to another, but we are so quick to respond that we end up doing the very things we don't want to do.

That old human nature within us fights against the ways of the Holy Spirit, and we end up doing what we don't want to do, even knowing the ways we should go. When we do what we don't want to do, we find that the Law of God exposes that sin in us (7:16). And not to minimize the decision I have to act appropriately, when I do what I hate to do, it is the sin within me that causes me to do it. At that time, I fall to the temptation to allow my human nature live in me rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to live in me.

So when I do bad things, when I treat people with little respect, when I pre-judge others, when I make snide remarks, when I retaliate, when I lash out in anger rather than show love, I come to admit that there is nothing good in my human nature. When I rely upon my own intuition, my own wisdom and my own strength, *There Is Nothing Good In Me!* (7:18). It all comes out of me, doing the things that I don't want to do, and the raging world around me walks right up beside me to say, "Well done, or Well said, or Way to go!" It only exposes my sinfulness. "*I don't do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do*" (7:19). This is the sin living in me, having mastery over my body and ruling in my heart (7:20), driving me to do what I don't want to do.

But that's not what I want to do! I don't want to be a raging, hurtful, mouthy lunatic proclaiming to the world how bad everyone else is! I want to be an example of God's love to those around me, treating them with respect and dignity even when they don't show it to me. I want to demonstrate God's forgiveness to the ones that hurt me. I want to share the love that God has for all of us with those around me so that they might be able to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior and find the Holy Spirit living in them, too. But the sin still living in me causes all of those good intentions to fly off and all that is left is that old, rotten, rebellious, repugnant old man that is within me. So, "*when I want to do what is good, what is evil is the only choice I have*" (7:21), since all that is good has escaped me.

While my spirit desires to follow the Lord's ways (7:22), the battle within me causes me to lose the very thing that I want. My mind goes in one direction and my body goes in the other direction. While I seek the Lord in my mind, my body constantly enslaves me to the sin that is in my old human nature. So the battle rages on within me between the good that I want to do and the evil that I don't want to do. I find that the chaos on the outside has invaded my own life and is pushing hard to take control of who I am. I am a wretched man living in a divided, fractured and spiritually distanced situation. And I echo Paul's question, "*Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death?*" (7:24).

My only hope is to give up on the things of this world and to turn to the things of God. I have to "crucify the flesh" so that the sin in me might finally be put to death (Galatians 5:24) and I might find the freedom of life in Jesus Christ. You see, God rescues me through Christ Jesus, and when I submit my life to Him, I am set free from this raging battle within me as I shelter in the refuge of the Lord my God. Our hope is only in Jesus Christ. He is God in the flesh, the Son of man and the Son of God, the Teacher, the Master, the Savior, the Mediator, and the Changer of Hearts and Minds. And He invites us to come to Him so that we might find hope. Listen to Matthew 11:25-30. (READ Matthew 11:25-30)

Jesus has come to disclose the Father to us so that we might not be discouraged and hopeless, but that we might find the courage and strength we need to continue on in our journey of faith. In Jesus'

prayer (11:25-26) we see that it is not those who rely upon their own selves who come to understand all that God is doing. No, it is those who find their lives up-side-down with a great need for a Savior who find the Good News of God in Jesus. If we rely upon our own selves, we have no need for God's help and we rely completely upon the old human nature that lives within us. That old human nature rationalizes the sin that is within us, and emboldens us to live any way that we want to live, even in total rebellion to God's ways. And when we abandon all of God's ways, it becomes a free-for-all as to what we follow, what we want, and how we live. And then, with everyone living the way that they want to live, we quickly find ourselves in the chaos and confusion like what is going on in our world today.

Jesus is the One who was given authority over all things (11:27) by God so that through our belief and trust in Him, we might find hope outside of this world. We know God only because Jesus has revealed Him to us. Without Jesus, we cannot know God the Father, for Jesus is the One who shows Him to us. And we are only able to know God the Father through Jesus Christ. He is the One who provides the way for us to be united again with the Father. He is the One who brings the truth about God to us. He is the One who provides eternal life to us. Jesus is the only way for us to receive the salvation of our souls back to God (John 14:6).

So Jesus invites us to come to Him so that we might grow close to Him, to come to know what He expects of us, and find His guidance for us. As we grow close to Jesus, we learn about the heart of God for all people of the world. We learn of His goodness and His desire that everyone be saved through Him. He is our hope for meaning and purpose in this life, and Jesus desires that we come to Him so that we might be encouraged by Him. As we grow close to Jesus, we are able to unload all of the worries and concerns and sorrows that surround us so that we might find rest through Him. We can unload fear to Jesus. We can unload troubles and trials to Jesus. We can unload physical struggles to Jesus. We can unload any addictions and bad habits to Jesus. We can unload relational problems to Jesus. We can unload financial burdens and future worries to Jesus. All of the things that weigh us down, and consume our thoughts, and dominate our minds, can be given over to Jesus so that we might

find peace in Him. He invites us to lay them all down at the foot of the cross and find release and comfort in knowing that “*all things will work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28)

But then, Jesus invites us to take His yoke upon ourselves. He says, “*take My yoke and put it on you, and learn from Me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest*” (Matt. 11:29).

Now, a yoke is used for animals to be hitched together in order to do work that is greater than any one animal can do alone. Oxen or horses are brought together and the yoke lays across their shoulders, connecting them together so that they might pull as one. That way the strengths of the two are utilized to the fullest and encouragement is given to allow the animals to accomplish the work together. When the work is too difficult for just one animal, the yoke brings another, or several others, side by side to walk alongside each other and accomplish the work needing to be done. When just one animal could not do the work all by itself, the yoke enables the load to be shared so that both can finish with enough strength to continue on.

The yoke also allows the farmer or driver the opportunity to guide and direct the animals. Since they are joined together now, the yoked animals must travel along the same path, going in the same direction and going at the same speed. When yoked together, the farmer is the one that controls the actions of the animals.

So Jesus invites us to become yoked together with Him. That means we don't have to try to do the work that is before us alone. When we pair up with Jesus, He gives us added encouragement and strength to accomplish all that we have been given to do. It means that Jesus allows us to connect His tremendous strength to our lives so that we can continue with Him and remain strong and encouraged.

It also means that Jesus is the one that guides us when we are yoked together. No longer are we wandering around doing our own thing, trying this or that, but we are now working together with Jesus to follow His agenda and do His work. And He has promised not to lead us astray, but to keep our path straight, with purpose and meaning.

When we are yoked together with Jesus, He has promised to protect us so that we don't get lost or separated or injured. When Jesus is yoked with us, we can rest our minds, knowing that He has our best interest at heart. So as He walks alongside of us, He watches over us, warns us of potential dangers, and leads us along in life so we are not bogged down in the swamps of chaos and confusion.

And Jesus is not wild, or harsh, or abusive with us when we are yoked together with Him, because He is "gentle and humble in spirit..." (11:29). His peaceful presence brings calm to our own lives, enables us to see situations completely differently, and to respond in ways that bring about His purpose of showing the love of God to others.

With Jesus working with us, being yoked together with Him, we are not trying to do everything by ourselves, but rather in tandem with Him. When we walk alongside of Jesus, He helps carry our load so that we can find rest through Him. We can "*cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us*" (1 Peter 5:7). We can be at peace, though the world rages around you.

Jesus invites us to come close to Him and be yoked together with Him so that our lives can become easier, and our burdens lighter. Jesus is pleased to help us along as we walk along with Him to follow His ways and finish His work. The road ahead of us may seem long and arduous, but when we have Jesus walking alongside of us, we have hope, and life, and love, and peace, regardless of what is going on around us. As we give ourselves to be joined together with Him, our trust in Him grows, our courage increases, and our willingness to serve Jesus improves, so that there is no longer any fear or worry or trouble too large that you and Jesus, together, can't handle.

So put on the yoke of Christ Jesus and let Him lead you, protect you, encourage you, develop you, and relieve you of all that burdens you. Then we can take up our cross and follow Him, in the strength of His steadfast love for us to the glory of God the Father, in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

Lead into communion service.