

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

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon 7.5.20

## Patti Case



O great Chief, light a candle in my heart, that I may see what is in it, and sweep the rubbish from your dwelling place. Amen.

The prayer I just shared with you is that of an African schoolgirl. O great Chief, light a candle in my heart, that I may see what is in it, and sweep the rubbish from your dwelling place.

Happy Independence Day. And just in time, our Gospel speaks to us of true independence. Freedom. In the most unusual way.

In the year 2000, Meredith Corporation published its first issue of Real Simple Magazine. The magazine is full of helpfully simple tips for cleaning and cooking, child-rearing and emotional well-being.

So after 20 years of Real Simple magazine, wouldn't you think that we'd all simplified our lives to the point of not needing a magazine? In fact, no. Real Simple is alive and well, boasting 7.6 million readers, 90 percent of them women. The brand launched a TV show which lasted a couple of seasons and now has several apps including "No Time to Cook?" which features 850 – yes, 850 different recipes. Simple, indeed.

We can't be satisfied. We play the flute and you don't dance, we wail and you don't mourn. I send you John and he's too strict for you, I send you Jesus and he has too much fun. The first verses of our Gospel this morning sound exactly like Americans contemplating all their choices in the grocery store, on the web, on television or in the mall. In the words of contemporary song writer Joe Jackson, "I'm so free it's driving me insane."

Richard Rohr, Franciscan friar and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, says our freedom isn't precisely the problem. He points out that by constantly trying to control things, we lose our freedom. And the more we try, the less we do and the more dissatisfied we are, the less free we are. It's a conundrum, to be sure.

No less so than the contrast demonstrated in these words: Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you....

Hold on a minute. Jesus carries the weight of the world! Why, oh, why, would I want to take that yoke? That's not freedom, it's slavery!

Rohr states: "We have, especially in the northern European countries, transformed the Gospel into self-control." Yet the Gospel, he points out, is about self-surrender.

As Rohr says, "We identify ourselves either with our thoughts, our self-image, or our feelings. We have to discover the face that we already had before we were born. We have to find out who we were all along in God before we did anything right or wrong."

No wonder Jesus referred to children in this story. "You have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants."

Infants don't put on false pretenses. Children are honest, sometimes brutally so, until we teach them otherwise. Adults, on the other hand, are so busy worrying about the next thing and the next that we don't live in the here and now.

"Take my yoke upon you." The yoke that is God's grace, that requires nothing from you. You don't have to be good enough. Smart enough. You don't have to have the answers. In fact, says Jesus, it's better for you if you don't. If you're poor and disenfranchised, so much the better to enjoy the kingdom of God.

You simply need to let go, to be, and God will yoke with you, making your burden light.

In other words, we just need to get out of the way. Maybe we as a society don't have all the answers. Maybe we're asking the wrong questions. Maybe we should just sit down, shut up and let Him lead us.

Maybe we should yoke with our fears, the very worries that God knows are inside us, that we bury ruthlessly because we know they make us poor, just like those sorry sots in the Bible.

I'll confess, I'm scared to death of sounding stupid. My parents both raised a child who believes words matter, that if I can find the right words I can convince you and you and you of my righteous position. And in my competitive, perfectionist mind the opposite is true. One wrong word, one poorly constructed sentence and the wrath of Mrs. Gruver will be upon me. I won't be successful in communicating. I spent an inordinate amount of time on this sermon yesterday because I so wanted to get these important points across to you, and yet...how funny, that the exact point I was trying to get across is that which I studiously ignored. This has nothing to do with my own eloquence. The best sermon I write, the ONLY sermon, is not mine at all, but God's. "Take my yoke upon you."

Just think. If CEOs across the world spent less time and money crafting the perfect statement and the brilliant, one-time donation in response to #BlackLivesMatter demonstrations, if they stopped and got out of their own way, if they yoked with God, what would happen? What if they yoked with God in the form of the least of His brothers and sisters? The poor and oppressed, those from the Black and Brown and LGBTQ and Other Lives Matter movement? What if they stepped out of their ivory towers and into the streets? Could true transformation happen? And what if it didn't? Could tomorrow be just incrementally better for the oppressed than today? In Rohr's words, we in the West have always thought we could think our way into a new way of life. But he observes that in the final analysis we live our way into a new kind of thinking.

Yesterday was Independence Day, the annual celebration of the birth of our nation. Or, as I call it, inventory reduction day. We live at the top of the ridge overlooking a pretty spectacular array of fireworks. Without leaving the comfort of our yard we can watch the show below us from the fireworks stands lining Highway 101 and 106, from the waterfront homes along the canal to Potlatch and Hoodspout and Union, up the Skok Valley and even from behind Cushman Ridge. It looks a little like war, with explosions behind every hill and dale.

I spent a bit of time yesterday contemplating our relationship with fireworks. When I was a kid, we'd purchase an array of fireworks from a stand out by the Burger Pit. Then we'd head to the Ashfords, Marian Eveleth's parents' place, on Hammersley Inlet, for a wonderful day of great food and friends, sparklers and salt water, and finally, just when I was usually about to fall asleep, the big, beautiful fireworks that the men set off on the dock. Today, the holiday seems different, as so many things do. We've made fireworks illegal in many places, including within the city of Shelton. They're too noisy and messy, and oh, by the way, we don't want to burn our town down. We have "legal" and "illegal" fireworks, and frankly, I don't even know where one buys "legal" fireworks anymore, but just outside of town at the reservations, these sovereign nations, we have these candy stores of things that pop and fizz and boom and light up the sky. Go figure. There was even a court case a year ago where a federal judge upheld the Yakama Nations right to sell fireworks despite the Yakima County sheriff's decree to shut them down. This is what our lawmakers and our judges do – they "fix" things. We love one another so we want to prevent house fires, but we also want to protect our freedoms. We've made an unsolvable issue over the way we celebrate our own national birthday!

Despite the noise and color below me on the reservation, it's understandable that many Indians don't think much of our Independence Day. In a series of stories published on the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of the American Indian web page, I found that many tribes have co-opted the holiday as a time to gather and celebrate their own traditions, traditions that the US government prohibited for over one hundred years. Fireworks have become a part of the celebrations, but the theme throughout these stories was precious family time. I loved this story from an individual in Santa Fe, New Mexico: "We chose to get married on the 4th of July. Having our anniversary on that day makes the day about love and the continuity of my Cherokee family and the families of all the cultures we've married with over the generations. It adds nuance to a day that could just be about patriotism and blowing things up. Plus we always have the

day off and get to spend the day with family and friends who believe in the importance of journeying together in peace and equality.”

Maybe it's that simple. Take my yoke. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

O great Chief, light a candle in my heart, that I may see what is in it, and sweep the rubbish from your dwelling place.  
Amen.