

*“Give Him Your Burdens!”*

You may have noticed this slide [The “Weighed Down” PowerPoint slide was shown.] as one of the current messages on our Digital Sign. My wife, Margaret, created that slide after seeing the Bulletin Cover and its quote from the New Revised Standard Version’s Gospel Lectionary Reading, “come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest”. The slide emphasizes the “heavy burdens” people experience with its questions, “Weighed down?” and “Seeking Rest?”

As I have contemplated that slide, it reminded me of the burden borne by a Greek mythological character, Sisyphus. I won’t take the time to share all the details of Sisyphus’ story. However, the following summary from Wikipedia might be helpful, as we consider Jesus’ teachings in today’s Scripture. [The “Sisyphus Slide” was shown.] Wikipedia states, “In Greek mythology Sisyphus ... was the king of Ephyra (now known as Corinth). He was punished for his self-aggrandizing craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only to watch it come back to hit him, repeating this action for eternity.” We might be tempted to cheer on such an eternal punishment when a ruler is a lying egomaniac, who is basically only concerned for his or her personal profit. Yet, a more valuable reason for us to recall the Sisyphus myth is how the weighed down experience is common to all of us, although, some persons are forced to suffer much more than the average individual.

Have you ever felt like you were repeatedly being forced to experience heavy burdens? What are the difficulties and hardships you have borne or are dealing with in the present? Do you ever feel like you are in an never ending loop of problems that you never get a break and never find relief? Does it seem, at times, like you are eternally pushing your burden up a hill and then having it fall back down on you? From whom or what can you get help to end such a depressing cycle?

When it comes to health issues, doctors and other medical professionals are often very helpful. However, they are not always able to help us experience the healing we need. Whatever problems we may encounter, there are other persons, who are trained to help us deal with them. But, they are not perfect and eventually, we will all come face to face with our own limitations and mortality. So, is there no where or no one to whom we can go and receive the comfort, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life we need?

There is “an old story about a little boy who was out helping dad with the yard work. Dad asked him to pick up the rocks in a certain area of the yard. Dad looked over and saw him struggling to pull up a huge rock buried in the dirt. The little boy struggled and struggled while Dad watched. Finally, the boy gave up and said, ‘I can’t do it.’ Dad asked, ‘Did you use all of your strength?’ The little boy looked hurt and said, ‘Yes, sir. I used every ounce of strength I have.’ The father smiled and said, ‘No you didn’t. You didn’t ask me to help.’ The father walked over and then the two of them pulled that big rock out of the dirt.” (Billy D. Strayhorn, *Freedom through the Yoke*)

Among the things Jesus taught his disciples in our Scripture Reading, one of them was for his disciples, including us, to turn to and depend on him and our Divine Parent. If we don’t call upon all of our resources – “all of our strength”, including our Divine Parent and our Savior, as the son finally did when his dad helped him, then we will find times, when we can’t get that big rock out of our lives. We will become like Sisyphus!

Jesus knew how stubborn we human beings are when it comes to recognizing we need help from someone else. That is why he explained to his disciples in **verses 28-30**, *“Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. 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. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.”*

Part of living the New Life in Christ includes putting our faith – trust in Jesus Christ and our Divine Parent. We are to especially do that by giving up the burdens – the heavy loads, which we unwittingly allow to control our everyday lives. For example, if one is very angry at someone or something because of some injustice or injury,

then that wound will continue to control one's life until the victim has let go of the anger. Fear is another heavy load, which can so disable us that we are unable to actually be about living the New Life in Christ. Sometimes our burdens originate from someone or something else. When one is so oppressed, guidance and the support of others is crucial, if we are to truly be free to live in the New Faith Relationship with God and one another.

God's Son, Jesus Christ, promised us he and God would help us with our "heavy loads" – he enlightens us, so we are able to follow the path – the life, which will truly give us rest! Living in Faith – putting Jesus' easy "yoke" on – taking on our "load" – the task we are given as people living the New Life in Christ is lighter than the burdens of going it alone! We are to follow Jesus' example of loving and relating with all people. Before his Public Ministry, Jesus had experience making yokes, which made the burden of carrying heavy loads easier.

Friends, there are some folks, who are given additional burdens by society. They need to receive Jesus' invitation to give him their burdens. That means, you and I and other believers are especially called to carry the Good News to them, so they might learn of it. Yes, we, as part of the lighter load – following Jesus' example, which we do when we take on the yoke of Jesus Christ, we are additionally called to do more for those, who are oppressed by the culture – even the religious culture. Some of the oppression is caused by prejudice. Some is the result of misguided beliefs, such as thinking someone is cursed or punished by God because he or she is ill or believing a person earns the Divine Parent's love, instead of it being given through God's unmerited grace.

A story reported on the internet reminds us of how everyone is valuable to God. The story is about a "well known speaker" who "started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, 'Who would like this \$20 bill?'

Hands started going up. He said, 'I am going to give this \$20 to one of you - but first, let me do this.' He proceeded to crumple the 20 dollar note up. He then asked, 'Who still wants it?' Still the hands were up in the air.

'Well,' he replied, 'what if I do this?' He dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now crumpled and dirty. 'Now, who still wants it?' Still the hands went into the air.

'My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20. Many times in our lives, we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless; but no matter what happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value. Dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless to those who love you. The worth of our lives comes, not in what we do or who we know, but by ... WHOSE WE ARE. You are special – don't ever forget it.'" (Author unknown.) No matter the prejudices and small thinking of the world, God Agape Loves and seeks to reveal to everyone the Divine Parent's Radical and Extravagant Welcome into the New Faith Relationship with God and one another and the New Life in Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ called his disciples and us to come to him with our burdens and he will give us rest! He promised our new load or calling is easy and light compared to the heavy loads we bore before we realized – faithed in the New Faith Relationship with God and New Life in Christ. We have this faith because of God's Agape Love revealed in Jesus' Life, Ministry, Suffering, Death, and Resurrection. Accept Jesus' and God's invitation to give them our burdens! Take up the Yoke of Christ, share the Good News with all people, and work for everyone to have justice and liberation from oppression. Amen.