



July 5th, 2020

The 5th Sunday after Pentecost • Proper 9A

Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67 • Song of Solomon 2:8-13 • Romans 7:15-25a

The Rev. Anthony Estes

What was your favorite childhood game?

As you can probably guess, mine was playing “church.” Me and my three sisters, we would get together and we’d set up a table and chairs — our *Little Tyke* chairs — in rows and I would preach, and my sisters would sing. And we just reenacted the church service.

Now, to be fair, that wasn’t the only game we played, although that was my favorite. We played house and we played school and we played doctor and we played office. We would take coffee mugs, and we would fill them with hot water to get the steam coming out of it, and we’d sip on the hot water like we were working in an office...like grown-ups.

Children...they mimic us. They watch what we do as adults, and they incorporate it into their playtime.

I think this is what Jesus has in mind when he’s telling this parable in our Gospel (*Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30*) today about these children who are sitting in the public square. Except that they’re not having any fun. And the reason why they are not having any fun is because one set of children wants to play a game called “wedding,” where the boys, acting like the men, would dance. But the other children don’t want to play that game...so they don’t dance.

Perhaps they want to play “funeral,” another staple of public life in the 1st Century of Palestine where Jesus was. They would sing the funeral songs and the girls, mimicking the women, were supposed to moan and mourn. But they didn’t want to play that either.

And so, I think at the end of the day, no one is happy.

There are lots of ways that that parable can be interpreted. It could be interpreted to mean that Jesus and John the Baptist are the ones initiating the game, and the people, particularly the Pharisees, don’t want to respond properly. Or, it could be the Pharisees are initiating the game and Jesus and John the Baptist are not responding properly.

That’s the frustrating thing about playing with others — that they don’t always behave in the way that we expect.

And today is no different, even as adults.

And though this public health crisis is not a game, you can see how so many people just don't want to play along. When you tell them wear a mask, grown men and women are having temper tantrums in stores all across the country.

You say something like "Black Lives Matter" and even the most reasonable people respond with "All Lives Matter."

You tell people to not only *not* be racist but to be *anti-racist*. And they bring up all kinds of things from the black community, such as crime rates and abortion rates, as a reason to dismiss their own apathy toward the subject.

It is remarkable that people can look at something dead in the face, have it standing right in front of them, and not respond properly

This is what Jesus is talking about when he's talking about John the Baptist. That you have John the Baptist, he didn't come eating or drinking, but people said that he had a demon. He was too austere. He was too strict. He was such a firebrand. People just want to live and play and sing.

Or what happened to Jesus, who came eating and drinking and being friendly? And they said, particularly the religious elite, about Jesus, they said he is a friend of sinners. He is a winebibber. He's a drunkard. He's a party animal. How can we take him seriously as a prophet?

You see, Jesus says that all of this is hidden from them. The true reality of who John the Baptist is, the true reality of who Jesus is, is hidden because they think they know it all already. They're the "adults" of the situation.

Instead, what God has done is God has chosen to reveal this uniqueness of Jesus to infants, to children...at play.

What does that have to do with us?

I think it simply means that we need to consider the evidence for Jesus Christ in the world today. And we need to believe and trust in him. We need to play along with Jesus. We need to see him for who he is. And we need to follow his example.

We need to, as Jesus says in the Gospel today, take his yoke and learn from him.

There are so many things vying for our attention. The most reasonable people seem to be falling for conspiracy theories.

I think Jesus is saying, "I want you to follow my example. And I want you to learn directly from me who God is."

If you are willing, if you are able, to engage childlike wonder, you will see Jesus for who he is. And you will see the truth, the deceptively simple truth, of what Jesus preaches: *To love one another. To love your neighbor as yourself.*

The thing about yokes, friends, is that only the poorest people would pull a yoke themselves. If you were wealthy, you would have a pair of oxen, or a pair of donkeys, to do that.

And Jesus is saying “I know you have this yoke upon you and there are so many other things that are bogging you down, that are keeping you from making real progress, that are making the load heavier. I, the Lord, want to lighten that load for you.”

That’s the thing about a yoke. It’s that we don’t live this life without one. There will always be someone telling us what to do and where to go and what to carry.

And Jesus says, “If you take *my* yoke, it will be light, it won’t be heavy, and you will actually find it refreshing.”

Jesus makes a case to us, in the same way that Abraham’s servant made a case to Laban (*Genesis 24: 34-38, 42-49, 58-67*). That look at all the things that Jesus does: He heals the sick, he opens the eyes of the blind. And I am not just talking about physical blindness, but I’m talking about spiritual blindness, as well.

*How can we deny the power of Jesus’ story?
How can we deny the power of what Jesus has done?*

We have to see it, and we have to believe it.

And we can’t be upset when other people see the same thing and they don’t respond appropriately.

I tell you that people who need to read books about racism are probably not going to be convinced that racism exists, because there’s so much evidence looking them right in the face.

We can pray for them.

But we understand that what we must do is carry this yoke and burden for our Lord.

That’s the only way we can, like the Song of Solomon (*Song of Solomon 2:8-13*), arise and come away with Jesus. Frolic! Play...with Jesus!

That’s the only way the internal tensions within us, like Paul talks about in Romans (*Romans 7:15-25a*), can finally be resolved: to put your trust in the yoke and the burden of Jesus, you will find rest...and you will find refreshment.

Only then, only then, watch this, can you really find out what it means to be free...what it means to be independent...what it means to be true to Our God...and true to our native land.