

Lectionary A July 6, 2014 4th Sunday after Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church
Evansville, IN
Roberta Meyer

Zechariah 9:9-12
Psalm 145:8-14
Romans 7:15-25
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Let the Puzzle Pieces Fly

My oldest daughter, when she was young loved to have friends over. Because I worked this didn't happen as much as she liked. So for her 6th birthday I planned a birthday party for her. I had all her little friends over, planned her favorite foods and games, the whole works. Everything was all ready. My living room was full of six year olds ready for some fun, but I couldn't find Amy. Then I noticed her bedroom door was closed. She had locked herself in her room. Nope, she didn't want a party. She was worn out from the planning She didn't want to play with friends. I couldn't win.

Jesus' words in our Gospel lesson make me think this experience. Listen to what Jesus is saying "Hey, we tried celebrating with you but you didn't want anything to do with that, so we tried crying with you, but that didn't set right with you either. Here are Jesus' words according to the Message Bible: *"John[the Baptist] came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riffraff"*

Now the Message Bible calls the people Jesus is talking to "spoiled children" I'm not sure I agree with the word "spoiled". I think Jesus was talking to a crowd of grumpy immature people who were tired of trying to figure everything out. These leaders of the Jewish people were trying their hardest to make sure they followed every letter of the law. If only they could be sure they knew all the answers and got all the questions right.

The problem was—here comes Jesus. Jesus questioned their interpretations of the laws. He taught the law, but wait a minute—he—he—isn't he breaking the law? He touches lepers; he is friends to unclean sinful people like tax collectors and prostitutes! He works on the Sabbath, like healing people on the day of rest and, why, he even picks grain out of the fields on the Sabbath then eats it with his disciples!!!

Then he has the audacity to come up with statements like Matthew 5:17, " *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."*(NRSV) It didn't make sense to them.

Jigsaw puzzles aren't my favorite things. To me it is very frustrating trying to get all those little pieces to fit together to make a picture. When I was young, as a family we would set up a card table and start working on a puzzle. It would slowly start to look like something as each of us worked on it when we had time. I remember once when the puzzle was making good progress and my brother came running by and knocked the table over. Pieces went flying.

That's kind of what was happening with these Jewish leaders . They were working hard on this jigsaw puzzle of God's law, trying to put each piece together so they could get a picture of what it looked like to perfectly follow the law. Then here Jesus comes and knocks that puzzle right off the table, scattering pieces everywhere, so nothing made sense!

These people are tired of trying to figure out God on their own. They are grumpy and I think they are scared. They are scared because, you know what? The stuff Jesus was saying made sense and if Jesus was right—then they were in deep (well, let's just say) trouble.

That's where we find Paul in our reading from Romans. He, Paul, who used to have it all figured out; who thought he knew where all the puzzle pieces went; He knew the law and he was killing those "Christians" who was breaking the law, then—out of nowhere, he is knocked flat on his face, blinded to everything he thought was right. Jesus sure flipped his jigsaw puzzle upside down!

And in our lesson from Romans he is expressing how he feels, knowing he can do nothing by himself to get out of that deep smelly pit. In the Message Bible he says, "*What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway.*"

Poor guy. But isn't that where we all are? Look in the bulletin at the words we confessed today. *...we confess that we are captive to the power of sin that dwells within us. We put ourselves first and others last. What we think will make us happy leaves us longing for more. Even when we want to do what is good, we find ourselves doing the opposite.*" (ELW)

If we really mean what we confessed to God at the altar this morning, we are all in that deep stinky place.

And that's exactly where Jesus meets us. "Don't be afraid. The puzzle isn't yours to figure out, anyway."

Notice there are several verses skipped in our Gospel for today. In the verses that are skipped, Matthew 11:20 to 24 Jesus warns all the communities where he had already been, because they had not listened to him even after they had witnessed his miracles. "*Doom to you, Chorazin! Doom, Bethsaida! ...And Capernaum! With all your peacock strutting, you are going to end up in the abyss. If the people of Sodom had had your chances, the city would still be around. At Judgment Day they'll get off easy compared to you.*"(Message Bible)

Jesus isn't messing around. It's pretty plain, isn't it? If we think we know God's business better than Jesus, look out. The puzzle pieces will fly!

But there is Good News. Jesus turns his attention to us tired, scared babies stuck in yucky stuff. "*I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants...*" (NRSV)

Jesus Christ came down to us; was crucified, died and rose to life to do away with that puzzle nonsense once and for all. Our salvation isn't up to us to figure out. It is God's free gift to us. Jesus invites us into a relationship with him. *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (NRSV)

These may have been frightening words for the people Jesus talking to. I'm sure what Jesus said didn't make much sense to them.

"Hey, if you are worn out from all your problems in life, come take on my yoke."

"Sure, Jesus, I'm up to my eye balls with problems and I'm going to take on your stuff, too?"

They knew very well what yokes were. Yokes were heavy wooden restraints used to tie beasts of burden together to do hard work. How can being hitched up to a yoke bring rest?

Let's be clear here. This scripture doesn't say believing in Jesus means escaping burdens or struggles in our lives. No, believing in Jesus means being yoked to Jesus. The hard stuff is still there, but we can rest in the fact that Jesus is pulling the load with us, with his head through the other head stall of the yoke. . It's not just that we are not alone either. It is more than that. Jesus is leading. We have the benefit of Jesus' guidance and wisdom. Jesus is steering and teaching us. So by being yoked with Jesus we become stronger and wiser. We become more like the one to whom we are yoked.

And—being yoked to Jesus not only means that Jesus shares our burdens. It means we share Jesus' burdens. We become more aware of Jesus' vulnerable children, those who are marginalized, abuse, mistreated by society.

Here at Grace and Peace our mission is to "Proclaim God's Grace and Share God's Peace through love and service to all." In the next several weeks we are going to examine our mission statement and what action it calls us to take as we discern our vision.

So today, how does being yoked to Jesus make this mission statement more powerful in our lives? How is being aware we are yoked to Jesus affecting how we proclaim God's grace and share God's peace? For prayer time this week pray about those burdens we all bear, asking Jesus to pull the weight with you. Also, pray for burdens of those in our church and community who are vulnerable and weak. Is Jesus leading our congregation or you individually in a specific direction to proclaim God's Grace and share God's Peace in places that you may not have thought of before?

Every Wednesday at 7:00 we gather at Grace and Peace to pray these prayers of our congregation and community. Everyone is invited to join us. If you can't come you can mark it on your calendars to pray at that time wherever you are. And you can send your prayer requests to me at rjhmeyer@gmail.com. That way we are all connected.

That's part of being yoked with Jesus, too—because if we are all yoked with Jesus, then we are yoked with each other, too. That's comforting, but sometimes it's scary, too. But don't worry. We don't need to figure it all out. We don't need to have all the answers. We don't even have to agree with each other. You see, it's not our puzzle to solve. Let the pieces fly. No. All we need to do is follow the one we are yoked to and see what happens. And someday, the pieces will come together and God's picture will be more glorious than we could ever imagine. Amen