

Jesus said, “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 ... and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” In the nineteen seventies, a Christian psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, published a book titled *A Road Less Traveled*. What is memorable about this book, that sticks with me all these years, is the opening sentence. “Life,” Dr. Peck said, “is difficult.” I think that anyone with any experience of life would agree that there are moments in anyone’s life when you would have to say, “Life is difficult.” For all of us, there are events, within our control or not, that bring anxiety and stress, sadness, grief and anger – a range of negative emotions. Hopefully, these feelings are offset by the joys of living; else depression becomes our overriding reality.

Years ago, a priest said to me that that life is like walking barefoot at night in a barnyard. Thought a bit more colorful, the priest and Dr. Peck were saying the same thing: life is difficult - for everyone, Christians included. Yet, we struggle to walk the path of life with dignity and integrity so that at the end of the day we can be at peace. We gain wounds in life, and we carry those wounds as a part of our character, a part of our being, our “self,” because we are the sum total of all of our experiences.

Into this world of struggle God sent his Son. Scripture teaches us something very important. God could have made it so that Jesus was above the trials and tribulations of life. Instead, God gave him trials and tribulations in spades, and in obedience to God, his Father, Jesus took all of this, to the Cross. Through his sacrifice, and our redemption in his sacrifice, we find unity with God, because we find forgiveness and reconciliation with our Creator.

In the Gospel this morning, Jesus tells us that his burden is easy and his yoke is light. If we turn to him, he will lift away the pain, the grief, the sadness and the anger that we carry as the product of human brokenness and sin. I can tell you that for me, at least, I have learned that my Lord’s yoke truly is easy and his burden is light. When I have turned to Jesus and asked him to lift my burden, self-inflicted or not, he has done so. I know that is also true for you. Faith has a way of loosening the straps of life and easing the way. Surely Saint Paul was correct when he said that in Christ Jesus, all things are possible. In Christ, we shall overcome.

I have also learned something else from Saint Paul, based on the reading from Romans this morning, and I think that all of us will gain much insight if we examine today’s Gospel in the context of this passage. Paul was both a lawyer and a theologian, but he was also a person like you and me who struggled with the trials of life. Paul knew what it was like to find rest in the yoke of Christ precisely because he remembered what it was like to live outside of Christ.

For years, Paul charted his own course through life, and by the standards of his world he did well. The son of wealthy and well-born Jewish parents, who were also Roman citizens, he had all that was needed to have a very successful and easy life. He had wealth, education, and political connections – the things that can take you to the top of the social ladder and give you great power and influence. Yet, like you and me, Paul struggled with life. He was smart enough to understand that for the most part he got himself into his fixes, and he knew that the ramifications he suffered were the ramifications of his sin. That’s the point that I want to make. Paul understood that by human nature, we are prone to sin. He wrote to the Church in Rome, “I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see within [me] another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells [within me]. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, [Jesus Christ will!]”

What we must learn from St. Paul is that we let sin happen. We do not have to do sin. We are not born to sin. We have functional minds that can analyze a situation and functional consciences that can discern right from wrong. God gave us the freedom to choose. Satan cannot compel us. The Devil does not and cannot make us do anything. Therefore, we and we alone have responsibility for our actions. Yet, in spite of our ability to choose rightly, we know that, like Paul, we often do those baser things knowing, even as we do them, that we will pay an unwanted and perhaps heavy price. I think that guilt is proportional to the development of the conscience. The human situation is not going to change. Resolve is good, but sometimes it melts away in the heat of the urge. Who will rescue us from ourselves? Jesus, alone, said St. Paul. And, Jesus does when we turn to him and accept him as our Savior. *Amen.*

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