

8th Sunday after Pentecost July 6, 2008

Sermon: BURDENS AND BLESSINGS

I want you to imagine your way into the Gospel passage this morning. Imagine yourself bent low under a heavy burden. What burden are you carrying? What is weighing you down? Is it sorrow? Is it anxiety? Is it over-work? Is it physical frailty or exhaustion? Is it a mismatch between your hopes and dreams and your present life? Whatever it is, Jesus is saying to you, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Imagine yourself joining a stream of people making their way toward Jesus. When you stand before him, he gently lifts the burden from your back. He encourages you to stand straight, and you feel the weariness leaving your body. "Take my yoke," he says. On your shoulders he places a stole or shawl, a sign of your special ministry in his name. And he hands you a certificate, your own commission from him. What does it say? *[Exercise from The Spiritual Formation Bible]*

There are as many reasons for feeling burdened as there are people in this room. Many of us are physically and mentally tired, and longing for a vacation of some sort. I was sure glad to get mine! Many of us are emotionally drained, heavy with sorrow and worry. Some of us facing illness ourselves or dealing with the illness of those they love. It intrigues me to think what commissions each of us would receive, were we to give our burdens to Jesus. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

So often the burdens we choose for ourselves, and that choose us, are horribly heavy to carry. Safiyah Fosua, a preacher in the American United Methodist church, points out that we have been caught in the message that says it is better to burn out than to rust out - as if those were the only options. So we become busy with busyness itself, as if our lives are of less value if we pause to get some rest and perspective. While I have sympathy for how full people's lives can become, it makes me sad to hear so often of lives so tightly scheduled that there is no room for even a small deviation in routine, no matter how positive the outcome of taking that extra time may be. No time to stop for a cup of coffee with a friend, no time to talk with a spouse or child, no time to fit prayer or study in, no time to go for a walk, no time for anything unscheduled or unanticipated. Do you think Jesus had a Daytimer or a PalmPilot? I don't think so. Jesus himself took time out for prayer and rest, and told his disciples to do the same. Maybe some of us need to hand over our Daytimers or our PalmPilots to God and say, "OK God, I'm going to take a time out, and see what happens." I'm one of those people who lives by her Daytimer - and let me tell

you, one of the most valuable things I've added to my life in the ten years of my ministry is a silent retreat, when the only thing scheduled is mealtimes - the rest is up to God. You might find, if you just give yourself a bit more flexibility and space in your day, that you receive a commission from God to spend your time in different ways. Who knows?

Some of you are carrying burdens you didn't choose: the care of an ailing relative, the sorrow of a lost love, the anxiety of an uncertain future. What stole might Jesus place around your shoulders? Perhaps your stole or your commission might read "Trust", "Strength", "Prayer", "Community", "Healing", "Courage". Perhaps your commission will be in the form of a double-yoke, and you and Jesus will carry that yoke together. That certainly makes the burden lighter.

In ourselves, we often are unable to handle everything that life throws at us. But when we lift those troubles up to God and ask that God work through us and our burdens for good, then we find rest. I like to think of it as the difference between going through life alone, and going through life with someone alongside you. We all have times when we need a strength outside of our own. Sometimes, the people we love most just don't have the strength to lend us - but God always does. I have seen this to be true, in my own life, and in the lives of those I have walked with as minister and as friend.

One commission some of us might receive is the instruction to shift our focus from our own lives to the lives of others. One of the best ways I have found to shift from weariness to new energy is to find a way to bring joy, hope or comfort to another person. I suspect that were our church to receive a commission, that would be it.

Another commission might be to add some beauty to the world. When I was in California, I went to Laguna Beach, which is full of art galleries. I saw work by everyone from Picasso to Rembrandt to the original lyrics of some classic Beatles tunes. I came back and found the rose bush in my yard in full bloom. I read a book written by one of my favourite writers that made me laugh and cry. The commission to create is one that gives life and hope to others. It lifts the burden, not only off your own shoulders, but off the shoulders of many others as well.

You may be the only one who knows what burden you are carrying today. I encourage you to share that burden with Jesus, and to ask Jesus to exchange that burden for a different load, a load which will become less a burden and more of a blessing, to yourself and to others. May it be so, for you, and for me. Amen.

