

Sermon Text – Sunday, July 5, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

1st Reading: Zechariah 9:9-12; 2nd Reading: Romans 7:15-25

Scripture: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 – “The Kids at Camp”

In June, I spent a week at Camp Laurelview – the youth camp for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in PA. From that experience, I can relate to what Jesus gave thanks and praise to God the Father for, that what is kept hidden from the wise and so-called intelligent is revealed to infants. This year camp was with thirty-five high schoolers, most of them I knew from previous camp experiences. I was amazed at how the middle school kids I met only two years previously had grown in maturity. I was thrilled to see their energy and enthusiasm for scripture. I was grateful for the love they had for each other and how that love grew over the week I was with them. It was wonderful to see their respect for the counselors, directors, and camp staff. I was especially thrilled when one young man – probably one of the hardest to reach – told me at the end of the week that I was one of the staff he actually liked!

I use the kids at the camp as an illustration because there is a connection to our scripture, these teens showed me that there is something new to learn. Jesus laments the childish games and the present generation's inability to be satisfied. This generation, our generation, prefers to sit on the sidelines uninvolved rather than take seriously either Jesus or John. Jesus laments that there is just no pleasing some people. He illustrates that thought when he says, “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” John was too aggressive, his ministry too hard edged but Jesus was too lenient and accepting of others. Jesus continues his lament with a prayer of gratitude for what God has hidden from the wise and intelligent he has revealed to the infants, or little ones, or the least of these.

I know that God's revelation of God's self, did not end with our scriptures. So please don't think there is nothing more for us to learn. I learned from the kids at camp to approach the lessons of life with the curiosity and joy of infants rather than thinking you know all there is to know. I learned from the kids at camp that time changes things, you can learn to love those you least think lovable just by spending some time and leaving the childish games behind.

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In this section of Matthew's gospel, we learn that John is in prison, he sends one or two of his followers to Jesus to question whether Jesus was the one that he, John, was sent to prepare the way for. I think John knew that Jesus was, of course he knew, but maybe he wondered what type of Messiah Jesus would be, so he asks. In the interim passages before what we just read, Jesus extols John's virtues. Jesus makes it clear to his listeners that John was the messenger they expected, the one that the scriptures told them would be the "voice in the wilderness" to prepare the way before him. Yet he was rejected just as Jesus was rejected. Jesus throws in a comment about wisdom being vindicated by her deeds. If you cannot accept John or Jesus as proclaimers of God's wisdom, judge them by their deeds. Jesus and John not only talk the talk, but they also walk the walk of righteousness.

Jesus moves from his lament about the games people play through his gratitude toward the Father. He reminds his followers that the Father and the Son are known to each other, "No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses." Jesus' relationship to the Father is strong, God, the Lord of Heaven and earth, is revealed in Jesus. We can reflect on what Jesus said that Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds and know that Jesus is God's word and wisdom incarnate – that is revealed in Jesus' sermon on the mount. John, in his proclamation and prophecy points to God's wisdom. Jesus is God's wisdom and his "burden" is light compared to the burden the Pharisees and religious leaders made of Torah law. "Wisdom born of enlightenment, renewal, and reorientation lightens, rather than burdens, the soul."¹

Jesus tells his followers to "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." When I think of taking Jesus' "yoke" I don't in any way consider that easy. I hear "yoke" and I think of a heavy burden, like oxen pulling a plow and I don't imagine that to be easy in any way. However, in ancient Jewish tradition, which is where Jesus is from, the word translated as "yoke" referred to teaching and instruction in wisdom. That changes the meaning of the last part of this passage. To take up Jesus' yoke then, in my humble opinion, would mean to find wisdom in the instruction of scripture – God's word.

¹ Mary F. Foskett "Matthew 11:25-30: Exegetical Perspective" *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew Vol 1. Chapters 1-13*. WJK. 2013. Print. pp. 297-301

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Rather than emphasizing Jesus' burden, we can focus on his words "learn from me" which leads us to God's wisdom. "As wisdom, Jesus provides us with a yoke that is neither an absolutist claim, standing over and against us as an abstract universal, nor a relativist acquiescence to our own or other people's whims and desires."² Which means we are free to live according to the way of the kingdom revealed through Jesus and not forced to conform to the restrictions placed on us by some religious authorities. We are free from the childish games that religious society sometimes play. Jesus invites us to rest in God's wisdom, to enact wisdom by redirecting our lives and our focus.

Scripture as a whole has a lot to say about wisdom. When Jesus beckons, "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." I believe he is referencing the words about "wisdom" that we can find in the book of Proverbs. In the eighth chapter of Proverbs "Wisdom" calls to those who will listen, "Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord." In contrast to wisdom, the childish games Jesus mentions are foolishness – the claim that John has a demon and that Jesus is a glutton and drunkard are foolishness. "Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Judge them by and discover wisdom in Jesus' and John's deeds!

Going back to the kids at camp, it would be easy to judge these teens by appearance or by the music they listen to and even the games they play. The kids I met however were more like the "infants" or little ones that Jesus refers to in his message. Like children they approached the scripture lessons with curiosity and joy rather than thinking there was nothing there for them to learn. Every day there was something new to learn, for them as well as for those of us who were supposed to be the wiser, more intelligent ones.

Church, like those kids at camp we could be open to the new things God is showing us – the new ways to live in God's kingdom, and the new people God is placing on our journey. Do not think that there is nothing left to learn and nothing left to see. Every time we open God's word there might be new gems to discover, new pearls of great wisdom. Jesus offers praise that these things are revealed to infants – maybe we should

² Lois Malcolm "Matthew 11:25-30: Theological Perspective" *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew Vol 1. Chapters 1-13*. WJK. 2013. Print. pp. 296-300

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approach our learning as infants. Maybe it takes emptying ourselves of all preconceived notions of the world to discover what God is doing in the world. Maybe like those high school kids at camp we can gain wisdom by realizing that we don't already have it and knowing that wisdom comes from God – revealed in Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls us to take his yoke and learn from him. His yoke is wisdom and wisdom is gentle and humble in heart. With God's wisdom, revealed in Jesus, we will find rest for our souls. The church, and individuals in it, will find rest for our souls as we remain open to the "new things" God is showing us and doing in our world. Wisdom can come to us in forms that are quite unexpected, learning something new from a section of scripture long committed to memory, or by seeing God in the faces of those you would least expect. When challenges come, be more like the kids in camp and approach the lessons of life with curiosity and openness. Wisdom might just be waiting around the corner for you to find her so you can see the new ways to live in God's family. May it be so!