

THE COST OF PEACE
[written in oral form]

Psalm 145:8-14; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
Proper 9, Year A

July 9, 2017
Gordon Allaby

In case you are smarter than I am and not aware, I'll fill you in.
There has been a G20 summit going on in Germany.
All the media outlets are ranting about how President Trump allowed his daughter to sit in his place, for a while.
Well, all the media outlets that I read.

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I read too many news reports, and I know better...because they're more terrorizing than informative.

I'm trying to read less, but I see the headline, "Trump's latest tweet",.....and I struggle to resist the urge to be flabbergasted.

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This strange infatuation is much like those who chose to go to a public execution, in the olden days, and then were shocked by what they witnessed.

We humans seem to want to focus on the negative, the bizarre and the outrageous.
Perhaps, we find some satisfaction and relief in the comparison to our own domain and our own opinions.

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Nevertheless, there is a lot of troubling information being broadcast these days,.....and some of it's even worthy news.

North Korea is misbehaving..... Refugees are drowning in the Mediterranean Sea; There's war in the middle east and elsewhere; famine in Africa; ...  
Oh, and not to mention global warming..... AND, interest rates may rise.....And,. there are rabid skunks in the area.....And, Waterloo property tax is due....

And,.....if you're over 60, you're advised to get a chicken pox vaccination to reduce the risk of shingles.....and....I'm going up north camping this week,..... did I change the oil recently?

On top of that, when I wrote this, it was a beautiful Saturday afternoon, and I needed to mow the grass before we leave, but I was stuck in the basement writing a sermon,.... because I put it off..... maybe because I was reading too many news reports.  
Who knows.....???

And,.....all this stuff feels heavy.....a heavy burden to carry.

In addition, I feel the weight of being expected to be a role model / of having my act together-- always calm, collected.

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Today's text is about finding relief through Jesus, and so I feel like I should be projecting, "Ah, come and join me in the cloud of peace."

After all, I'm supposed to practice what I preach.

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Truth be told: I'm often the object in most of my sermons. The message is much loftier than me. Still, I do reach / I do try to be the message I present.

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> Deep breath []

In Matthew 11, Jesus was calling his critics whiners for berating John the Baptist as too pious and for accusing himself as being too inclusive and liberal.

The criticism and the rejection upset Jesus,..... and so he turned to God and shared his disgust and frustration, saying,.....:

These people just don't seem to get it.

What else can I tell them or show them?

They are Not catching on..... They think they are so smart,... in fact it is the “intelligent” / the powerful / the affluent.... who fail to realize that they need help / that they need to be rescued.

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Jesus continued by suggesting that only the broken, the weak, the hurting – those who are as a child are the only ones who reach out for help / for redemption – for salvation.

The successful, the self-sufficient, the arrogant are the ones who complain and stress out over the littlest things, .... such as vehicle maintenance.

! Ah,.... but **there are** those who are looking for help / who know that they are in turmoil and despair.

*It is almost as if Jesus suddenly realizes that **there are** people who are ready for help/ who want to change,..... because his whole tone altered, when gave the invitation:*

“Come to me, ALL you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

It is an invitation to “All” / to everyone..... without exception.

Of course, in the context of his discourse, Jesus is including those who feel the weight of keeping the religious laws, of sustaining a certain standard of living .... and trying to be self-sufficient.

And, it is not easy being a “good religious” person or living an affluent lifestyle – there is so much expected.

The religious, like the affluent, must Act like everything is working / as if their life is wonderful,..... while hiding the secret of their doubts and pains. And, that charade is very heavy..... very heavy.

Any secret is a very heavy burden, especially when it's the desire for help / for salvation.

We rarely talk about salvation, I guess because it's our secret.

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But, again note, this invitation for relief / rescue is issued to everyone.

Jesus doesn't screen anyone. Regardless of gender, age, status, vocation, political party or sexual orientation, Jesus invites ALL to lay down ones' burdens, come to the rescuer to receive salvation and to find rest.

Rest Relief..... rescue.

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We can easily discern from Jesus' life and teachings that this "Rest" is not idle laziness, but rather a **place of peace** that overcomes fear, anxiety, uncertainty and meaninglessness.

This Rest..... is a better place / a better way. It is a place of wholeness.... where life continues..... in a healthy, peaceful manner.

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This nature of rest fits with Matthew's paradox... which is that Salvation is both a gift and a demand.

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God gives all and demands all.

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It is **grace** and **life**,..... and true life demands to be lived in abundance with God.

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The remainder of the invitation by Jesus supports this understanding.

Jesus continued, " 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.

This parallels to the Psalm reading about a gracious and gentle God

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The new yoke is a gift,..... and the journey / the work continues, but in a very different way..... a very different way.

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Looking more closely: the Greek word for "Easy" means kind and good. In other words, this New yoke fits well. It does not irritate the neck. It is NOT a source of discomfort.

And, the word for "Light" suggests how it Feels. It doesn't Feel burdensome. It Feels okay, even good.

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The yoke Jesus is referring to is not the heavy yoke that oxen are hooked up to. The yoke is likely the long piece of wood that would carry buckets of water or other loads at each end. []

We can imagine that most of them would cut into the shoulders, and feel very painful.....burdensome, especially if the load was heavy.

Think of a bad fitting pair of shoes,..... with pebbles in them, and you'll get the picture.

In contrast, the yoke that Jesus offers – God's way of living / being ...actually fits well, and the demands do not pull us down, but instead are light / manageable.....easy..... peaceful.

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Jesus presented that life can continue in a better way / to a better place. Some people rant about wanting relief, a better way. But, it is those who confess being helpless in despair and pain that tend to be willing to change/ to relocate to a place of peace.

The invitation by Jesus is A Rescue / A salvation...to peace.

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Jesus' way that is easier and lighter is **NOT a quick fix**, but rather a journey in a new way / a different direction.

Instead of the heavy weights of resentment, anger, fear and frustration, there is the hope of being on the way to a better place / to peace.....where love and grace prevails.

It is the way.....to all that is God.

BUT,..... there is a cost to this peace.

There is a demand with this gift, and it includes letting go / leaving behind what we, with our own power, have built to make us feel safe and secure. We have to be refugees!

We have to let go of our lies and myths, and **trust** Jesus' way / God's way to peace.

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Peace is not free, this we know.

Our culture ... which embraces redemptive violence,... tells us that peace must be purchased with blood – by killing and dying..... as if peace can be taken. That is a myth.

Peace is achieved with love....by giving up / by letting go / by giving to another.

Most wars are fought by those who want to keep what they have or want to take what they don't have.

War doesn't happen when one community / one country offers to give of one's self or possessions to another.

Peace happens when we give and when we work to create balance, justice and wholeness in the world.

This requirement / this cost is even harder to swallow when it's personal. It's not easy to be gracious and loving to our personal adversaries.

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To take on Christ's way, we must let go of our own way. We must let go of CONTROL, and that can be difficult.....unless we fully appreciate our desperate need to be rescued / saved.

I don't mean to sound like an alarmist, but unless we are being saved, then we are in trouble / we are in way over our heads. Our torment, discontent and absence of peace bears witness to our peril.

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The human calamity is the span of life, and the turns, twists and termination are all a mystery. We are really not so powerful.

In fact those who cling to what they claim is theirs are fools for not letting go.

We know this. I believe, everyone confronts this truth during those still quiet moments of aloneness.

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God comes to each of us with the invitation to be rescued / to be saved / to receive peace. It is a gift,.... with a cost, and the cost is personal.

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Nicodemus was a religious scholar with all the answers, except how to secure eternal life. Jesus told him to let go of all his answers, to have a renaissance of thinking / to begin again into Christ way of living. Nicodemus's cost was to release the trust he had in his answers.

The Rich man had to let go of all he owned and give it to the poor. His wealth was causing an imbalance. His life was stealing the peace of others and his own.

Jesus gave his all,.... **not** to buy our salvation, BUT rather.... to show us salvation is God's way / the way to peace.

Peace is wonderful, but there is a cost to peace. ~~~~~

Yet, that which steals our peace is even more expensive!