

## Interactive lesson



picture from <https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-plowing-the-field-using-oxen-16510014/>;  
photo credit: Mehmet Turgut Kirkgoz

When talking about farm equipment, what is a yoke for?

What kinds of things do you need to keep in mind when using a yoke?

I need a couple of volunteers to help carry something down the aisle and back.

How well did that work?

What would make it easier?

What if you had to pull a heavy weight from that pole? Who would do the most work?

What is the man in back doing with the pictured oxen?

Do you think the oxen truly understand why they are being directed to do that work?

God calls us to live and work in ways that make God's kingdom fruitful. We may not understand why we are called to do it or who we need to do it with, but if we move forward in faith according to God's guidance, God will keep us on the right path and make our work fruitful. Let us always trust in the Lord.

## Gospel lesson

Just before today's Gospel reading, John the Baptist had heard from jail about Jesus sending out disciples to the towns, so John sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He really was the Messiah.

Jesus sent them back with instructions to tell John about the miracles Jesus did and essentially not to get mad that Jesus's actions were not what was traditionally expected of the Messiah.



*picture from MMMS collection*

### Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

NRSV

<sup>16</sup> "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

<sup>17</sup> 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon';

<sup>19</sup> the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

<sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, "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;

<sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

<sup>27</sup> All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup> "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be"

UMH #399>

## Message: Taking the Yoke



picture from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/the-path-of-the-disciple-learning-to-grow/sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Almighty source of all wisdom,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,

- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may better understand Your direction for our lives and work towards the glory of Your kingdom on this earth. Amen.

“On the path of a disciple, we are learning to grow in our relationships with Christ and with the community. It begins when we take the yoke.”



*picture from MMMS collection*

I have heard marriage described as taking on a yoke:

- † Two people embarking on life’s journey, each having to pull some of the weight of the relationship, committing to stay the course together.
- † They leave a mark on the world where they have been.
- † If the influences guiding them are good and they work hard, they can have a very productive life together.
- † If either has a problem, they both have a problem.
- † If the match is uneven, one of the partners does a lot more work than the other, it may be that neither is comfortable, and they may struggle to follow their intended path.

Abraham wanted his son Isaac to have a suitable wife and he trusted in the promises of God, so he sent his servant to bring one back from their extended family. The faithful servant prayed to the Lord for guidance and help, and God blessed all involved with a fruitful search.

I relate to this because during the first Spring semester when I was in college, I prayed about meeting the man I was to marry and spend my life with, and with God's guidance I got romantically involved with Keven shortly thereafter.

I believe God answers prayers in ways that enable healthy, loving relationships. Certainly both Isaac and the world were blessed through Rebekah, the answer to the servant's prayer.



*picture from MMMS collection*

Do you see your spouse as an answer to your prayers? What about other people in your life?

How often do we have expectations about how other people should be, should look, should act, instead of simply welcoming them for who they are and what they do? I confess that I was put off by the psalm today which celebrated a bride to the king, because it treats women like objects with a physical/material

focus. I much preferred the story in which Rebekah was asked if she wanted to go with the servant.

Jesus spoke about people of His day as being like immature children who, instead of responding to God's calls, just mocked those who came in God's name. People still do this today, demanding perfection of others even as they themselves are stumbling. Yet even though we know we cannot please everyone all of the time, we can get burned out striving to do so.

Even Paul wrote to the Romans about how hard it is to do what is right even when we know it intellectually – we are prone to sin, and sin gets us into all manner of problems. So how do we do better?



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photo credit: Stilfehler*

Jesus calls us to take on His yoke. God came to earth fully human, matching us so that we could be yoked with Him.

- † Jesus knows our struggles and helps us stay on the correct path.
- † Jesus sets an example for us of how to bear our portion of the load.
- † If we stumble, Jesus is a steadying presence; Jesus can compensate for our lack of strength when we get into difficult stretches.

† Jesus does not kick or attack those yoked to Him, but is firm in having the yoke follow God's will.

What happens if we decide we want to go in a different direction than God directs when we are yoked with Jesus? If that happens with two animals yoked together, the obedient one bears all the weight while the farmer works on getting the disobedient one to comply. Once the one fighting the yoke gets tired enough, it will settle into the yoke and bear its portion of the load, relieving the extra load from the other. However, the longer that takes, the more wounded the obedient one may become from the stress.

Jesus bore the weight brought on by our sins so that we could learn how God would have us live in love. He said, "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." Jesus pulls His weight & then some!

But note: Our relationship with Christ is not a sin-enabling one where Christ pays the price for our behavior so that we can just continue in our bad choices. He walks beside us as our example of how to live in the kingdom of God - and when we follow that example it is much easier for us and all around us.





background picture from  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/people-taking-group-picture-3184398/>;  
 photo credit: fauxels

And what about when we bind ourselves to one another as part of a Christian community?

- † We each need to do our part, contributing what we can to the greater good. Sometimes we give out of plenty, sometimes not so much, but we must try. God gave us each gifts – use 'em for God's glory!
- † We each need to follow the direction of God, not assume that we know best what is supposed to happen. We may need to let go of our expectations of what others “should” or “must” do. Open your eyes, your ears, your hearts to who other people actually are and what they are doing, and celebrate them as God's gifts to our community.
- † If we see someone stumbling or struggling, do what we can to nurture their efforts, to glorify God. It may mean doing extra work for a time or bearing wounds until they can do their part again.
- † We are to forgive and accept others once they do start pulling their load. After all, Jesus has already provided similar accommodation for us.



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[a-graphics](#)

Living in love this way enables true Christian community, the kingdom of God on earth. So pray to God for guidance and direction in how best to live. Give God thanks for the gifts that other people are in our lives. And take the yoke of the Lord upon you, for Jesus's yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Amen.