

SERMON: 2017/07/09 - BTR

[Interview Ainsley, Jarrod, Campbell and Olivia Smartt about Camp Gailor-Maxon.]

Now, this business of "camps" is a foreign thing to me. It doesn't really exist in England, so what is it?

... [Thank them and dismiss the children to their "classes.]

I'd like us to focus on the very last thing that we hear Jesus say in this morning's gospel reading, which is worth repeating(!), and this is that 'all [who] are weary and are carrying heavy burdens' should come to Him, because they will find 'rest' - and that sounds great, doesn't it?

*But then* He immediately seems to contradict Himself, for the remedy that He has for those "burdened" people is a 'yoke' [Mt.11:28], which, certainly in my imagination, is *not* a light thing to carry at all!

Picture it: a solid, thick beam of wood, maybe two metres in length, intended to straddle the massive shoulders of a pair of oxen.

And carrying this is supposed to bring *me* some relief?

To be 'easy'.

To be something that I should *want*?!

Additionally, consider its purpose: to *control*. *That's* the reason for its invention: a yoke is a device to enable a farmer to exert His will. And *this* is what Jesus offers? Something comparable to a 'yoke'? As if it were a gift?

What a paradox, *right*?

It should take some *pretty* slick advertising gurus to "spin" this offer - *and yet many* see these verses as being the "Good News" itself, the *heart* of the Christian message.

And I'd be one of those!

This is my experience.

So, *how* can this be?

Well, I think that what Jesus is talking about is "*telos*."

A Greek word.

And it doesn't really have an equivalent in the English language.

But it means something like: "ultimate object" or aim. It is that thing that, more than any other, you hunger for. Desire and would struggle and exert yourself to obtain.

For honey-bees, it is nectar. And for ants, like the pesky ones swarming in my

kitchen - including in the cereal-box itself(!), it is to obey their "queen."

And we've all got a "telos" too, (though, admittedly, it can be elusive to "pin it down").

And it entraps us. Holds our focus, so that we neglect other tasks, and develop a sort of "tunnel vision" - becoming like a beast, narrowly focused on following the furrow, "yoked" to (another's) plow.

Our "telos," then, really, *really* matters. We're defined by it.

And Jesus saw that standing in the busy marketplace, which is the context for the today's lesson:

Unlike some of the sleepy villages that He'd been preaching in so far, chapter 11, from which these verses [tap Bible] are taken, concerns a period of time He spent in the cities of Galilee, where men and women "charged around" on business, buying and selling, trading and gossiping, and did do mostly oblivious to the gaunt street-urchins squatting in the gutters playing flutes, (we hear), in the hope of attracting some small change.

In London, which I know quite well, this is a very common sight. Students and delinquents and the homeless vainly "busking" as multitudes of bankers and lawyers and others in suits "zip" past on some important errand that couldn't possibly be postponed for the two minutes it might take to remove their wallet or purse from a pocket and dispense some meagre charity.

And this was the scene our Savior witnessed. And it perplexed Him. For what if our "telos" is the wrong one?

In the animated film 'Fantasia', a sorcerer's lazy apprentice - Mickey Mouse - casts a spell on a mop to clean the floor of the house, and disaster ensues. You know how it goes! Dun, dun, dun da da dun... nothing can deter the enchanted mop from its task, even when Mickey attacks it with an axe. It just keeps going and going, causing a flood and almost drowning the hero.

And many of us do likewise - give priority to the wrong "objects," sex, money, applause, and chase after them with a blind fury - a passion - unjustified by their real value, and oblivious to the harm they can cause.

I mentioned last week that I was briefly in the army and suffered a near-death experience, and that's because my "telos," at the time, was a superficial, vacuous one - machismo, "being adventurous" or whatever.

But we were created for a single purpose, to be "children of God," who is, by definition, 'not of this world' [Jn. 8:23], and who must, therefore, intend that we

seek after - 'run' after, in fact [1 Cor. 9:24] - *heavenly* as opposed to worldly "goods." "Goods" that may at first appear foolish [1 Cor. 1:27], like "humbling yourself," "turning the other cheek" [Mt. 5:39] and sitting here on a (sunny?) Sunday when you could be elsewhere.

But *these* are things that God, in this book [gesture to Bible], asks of us. To be 'conformed to the image of his Son' [Rom. 8:29] - as if wearing a 'yoke'.

And this will be hard - hard for our bodies, that is. Which is why what we are promised (in the passage, if you look closely), is 'rest for [our] *souls*'. (Don't overlook that plural noun. Jesus is a supernaturally-gifted communicator, and every word is of critical importance.) But when we align ourselves with His will, we will become unconcerned with the (physical) sacrifices that that will entail, because we will discover that the treasures of our salvation, like a unique, one-of-a-kind pearl [Mt. 13:44], are more than worth it! I'm referring, of course, to eternal life - and in the paradise of Eden re-made. *Such* is the immeasurable prize that Christ offers us - and more! - by His sacrifice on the cross. Amen.