
WORD MADE FLESH

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Weariness and Rest*

Zechariah 9:9-10, Romans 8:9,11-13, Matthew 11:25-30

The words of the Gospel are so familiar... haunting. "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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." I have seen this "yoke" since early childhood and never assumed it was easy to bear. The last thing we did with our Father before we laid him to rest was to place the little brass yoke he had worn like a vestment back on the lapel of his burial suit. "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Such an extraordinary idea.

The prophet Zechariah, in today's reading, calls us to rejoice for our king "comes... triumphant and victorious... humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Some kingship this. Zechariah proclaims that he who is riding this foal of a donkey will "cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem" and bring the warrior's bow to naught. It is the dominion of he who rides the donkey which "shall be from sea to sea." Such irony: kingship and the vanquishing of chariots and war horses by the one who rides a donkey. As absurd as suggesting a "yoke is easy."

The Apostle Paul, writing to the young fledgling community of Christians at the centre of the Empire in Rome (I think again of the king riding the foal of a donkey), suggests something similarly absurd. He doesn't call the community to moral renewal, some girding up of their loins to do battle with the forces of evil in the world. Rather, he declares, "My sisters and brothers, you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you." It is the Spirit of God which gives life to our mortal bodies, the Spirit of God which is life and vanquishes the presence of death in our world.

Let us begin again with the Gospel.

Jesus begins his discourse, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants...." Infants know what seems ironic and absurd. Infants, taking life as it is given. Infants, always powerless. Infants, in which body and spirit are one. Infants, "yoked" to being, "easy and light," disarming all who approach whatever chariot or war horse they may imagine they are mounted on, whatever hobby-horse they ride.

Chariots and war horses carry the burdens of authority, of "flesh" like causes as the Apostle Paul puts it. Only on the donkey, the foal of a donkey, does the king who's spirit is life, come riding. Only yoked to being, yoked to life - given by the Spirit - is the "burden easy and light," for it is and it bears only that which is life.

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