

Sermon Title: **“Taking the Yoke”**

Bible: **Romans 7:15-25a & Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

When: on Sunday, July 9, 2023

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

Opening Prayer

O Lord, we come to you, because you are our Lord, and because we are your servants. We need you, O Lord. Please guide us with your love and grace! Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

1. Smarter World?

We live in the United States in the 21st century, which means that we live in the smart world. Most of us have smartphones and devices. With smartphones, we can do many things. We can give calls, send and receive texts, take photos or videos, make notes, manage our schedule and calendars, watch YouTube videos, check Facebook and Instagram, and so on. It seems like we cannot live without our smartphones. And we can say that, thanks to smart devices, our lives are way better than before. Do you agree with this? Definitely, our lives are way more convenient than before. But are we happier than before? Can we tell the differences between convenience and happiness?

I heard that because of smartphones and social media, we might be less happy or more depressed than before, because we tend to compare our lives with others' lives on social

media. As you might experience, we tend to share the best moments of our lives, not the worst, or not even aspects of our normal everyday lives. When we see the news on TV, it seems like our society is full of problems. But when we look at our smartphones and social media, it seems like our society is something like paradise or utopia.

I also learned that smartphones are so smart that they show us what they know we like and what we want. Have you ever been surprised at the Facebook or Youtube commercials on your smart phones? How do they know what we want? When we do online shopping, somehow they collect our shopping history, and they make suggestions as to what we might want! Sometimes, the algorithm guides us to see and listen only to what we like. I am not sure if we really know what we want. Who has the power and freedom to choose? Some sociologists suggest that because of smartphones, devices, and algorithms, our societies are becoming more disconnected and more polarized than before. That's because we are exposed to only what we like and what we are comfortable with. There is no room for meeting others who have different ideas. There is no room for accepting others who are different from us. We might be smarter than before, but we might not be as open as before. Do you remember when we used old phones? Do you remember when we did not have cell phones? Probably, at that time, we might have been more patient, more tolerant, and more open-minded, because we were not that smart.

In today's reading of the Gospel of Matthew, neither John the Baptist nor Jesus Christ was welcomed by the wise and the intelligent. For those who thought of themselves as wise and

intelligent, who thought of themselves as smart, there was no room to accept John and Jesus. Because John the Baptist did not eat and drink, he was rejected. Because Jesus did eat and drink with the marginalized, he was rejected too. The wise and the intelligent thought that they knew everything, and that they did not have any room for other thoughts and even for others who were different from them.

But our faith community has room for others, even though we are different. When we have our open communion, we confess that the table is not yours, not mine, but God's table. Likewise, this church is not yours, not mine, but God's church. As we welcome everyone to the table, we welcome everyone to this church. I learned that some of you are from Catholic, some from Lutheran, some from Presbyterian, some from Episcopal, some from non-denominational churches, and some even from other religious traditions. Our founder, John Wesley said, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences." We are here not only as Methodists but also as Christians. And we are all followers of Jesus Christ, even though we think differently. It is okay not to think alike. But we will follow Jesus and love one another. I love the large and diverse spectrum of our church. And I hope to continue this ethos of the church.

2. Fight in Us

The first reading from Romans reminds me that we can be wrong. Sometimes, we do not know what we want or what we need. Whenever I see a doctor, my doctor suggests to exercise more and eat less or healthily. For my healthy body, I need to exercise more and eat less or eat healthy food, right? Eating more vegetables is not easy. Eating more broccoli is difficult. Do I really understand my doctor's advice and follow it? No, not always. To go to a gym to exercise and to go to a swimming pool is always challenging. In front of the broccoli, there is a big fight in me. Sometimes I win and sometimes I lose. Sometimes, even when I win, or choose the broccoli, I am not that happy. I chew the broccoli with my frowny face. How about you? Do you really make the best choices for your healthy life? Is there any room within us for making a wrong decision? Is there any room for us to accept this truth that we are not perfect, we can make the wrong decisions? Is there any room for us to admit that we need help?

3. Taking the Yoke!

Our Lord Jesus is waiting for us to come to him, because we are weary and because we are carrying heavy burdens. We all have our own problems, small and big, visible and invisible. We thought we were smart. We thought we could make the right and the best choices. We are not that smart. We can make the wrong decisions. We are not perfect. We need help. Do we have the courage to ask for help? Do we have the faith to follow Jesus? In our hectic, complicated, and burdensome lives, Jesus is waiting for us to come and to give us rest. Can we come to our Lord with our problems and our burdens?

I would like to explain more between verses 28 and 29, between “Come to Jesus” and “Take the Yoke,” which is the part about rest. When you come to the Lord with your heavy hearts and burdens, please enjoy the rest fully. It might be like taking an airplane. As you trust your pilot, how about trusting our Lord? Sometimes, we do not have any energy, as we are just exhausted. We have our great pilot in our lives, even though we cannot see the pilot. Many times, we need to drive ourselves, but sometimes, the pilot carries us. We do not need to hold our handles tightly all the time. Give your handle to the pilot. We just carry our baggage, even excess baggage, to the airplane. Trust the pilot! Fasten your seat belt, and enjoy the flight!

Then, when we are ready, Jesus asks us to take the yoke. What is the yoke? The yoke is a wooden cross piece that is fastened over the necks of two animals to carry the plow or the cart. The yoke needs two. Next to us, Jesus will carry our burdens together. Jesus did not promise to remove all the problems or burdens. But what Jesus promised is that the yoke is easy and the burden is light. Jesus will take care of our problems and our burdens together. You are not alone. Jesus will guide us, encourage us, and empower us! I hope that this blessing of taking the yoke will be with you and me, and be with our church!

Closing Prayer

O Lord, we are not that smart. We have heavy burdens. We come to you, Lord. Please take our burdens and heal our spirits and bodies. Please guide us to take the yoke with your holy presence and with your strength. In Jesus' name. Amen.