

Invited to Sync with Jesus

Early into my first job after graduating as an engineer, I was placed on a project to rebuild some items. They had been returned by our customer, who was also our parent company, as they were not satisfied with the items. Ron, from Quality Control, was placed on the same project with me.

Neither of us had worked on the original items. But it was our job to make sure they were rebuilt properly. Not only had the workmanship been shoddy but they were simply built wrong. They should have been rigid, but instead they were floppy. Additionally, we were going to have to salvage the materials because it would be months before replacement materials could be delivered. The items affected delivery of a bigger project and so it had come to the attention of very senior management. Not a good situation.

The finger-pointing started immediately; he said, she said. Within a couple of days Ron and I instituted a rule that neither of us would meet with anyone on the project without the other person being present. We wore a path in the carpet where we walked back and forth to each other's desks. It ended up being the rule that saved us a lot of work, saved our jobs and resulted in good items being shipped. We were jokingly described as being joined at the hip because where one was, the other was also. Success came because we were in sync.

Teamwork, working in sync, is one of the benefits of a team of oxen. A single ox can haul a little over its body weight. A team of two oxen, yoked together, can pull up to three times their combined body weight. Or a team of two can pull up to five times as much as a single ox. Happy to go through the maths with you if you are confused.

Oxen are no longer used in farming in Canada, so we do not see them at work. They can occasionally be found at living history museums such as *Sainte Marie among the Hurons* in Midland and *Fanshawe Pioneer Village* in London.

In addition to being able to pull much higher loads, a yoke is also used by farmers to train inexperienced animals to pull the weight of the plough. Yoked together, it truly is teamwork, it lightens the load.

Life under the occupying Romans was not easy, they had been in Israel for nearly 100 years when Jesus was teaching and healing. For most of the locals it was a subsistence living. The lucky ones had a trade such as farmer, fisherman or carpenter; the others hired themselves out as day labourers, hoping to make enough to survive. It was stressful for everyone.

Here in Canada, fortunately we are not dealing with an occupying force, but life can still be pretty stressful at times. Whether it is job pressures, cell phones, emails, social media, the cost of living, illnesses or ailments of all sorts. I do not need to explain; we all deal with stresses. Not always the same ones, but stress is stress.

Talking of stresses – when technologies sync with each other it can make life easier when:
the phone syncs to the car
the phone connects to the computer

the hearing aid syncs to the TV
the computer connects to the backup device.

Great when they sync, and really frustrating when they do not.

Jesus makes an offer to all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and says, “I will give you rest.”

“Come to me, ..., and I will give your rest.”

From a man known for his hospitality, compassion and generosity, this sounds wonderful.

Then Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you.”

But a yoke is used so that oxen, and other animals such as horses, mules, donkeys and water buffalo can be put to work pulling heavy loads; that was why the yoke was used.

When I am carrying a heavy weight, whether it is physical, spiritual or emotional burden, I would like Jesus to simply take it away, relieve me of my burden, not tie me to someone else.

But what we desire, and what we need are not always the same thing. God has promised that our needs will be taken care of.

We see once again that God’s ways are not always our ways.

We are not promised that the load will be removed,
instead we are urged to trust Jesus and place his yoke on our shoulders.

With faith in God, who knows our needs and helps us carry our load, our load is lightened and our souls refreshed.

Through Jesus we learn to do our own work, as when an inexperienced ox is paired with an experienced partner to learn how to pull the plough.

Through faith we are partnered with Jesus.

In our busy lives, taking up something new, adding something more seems like it is a step backwards.

But the time taken in prayer, or in bible study or other spiritual discipline is how we get to know Jesus better. It is how we adjust the yoke to fit comfortably on our shoulders.

Through the yoke placed on our shoulders we learn who get in sync with Jesus, who will teach us.

When what we are going through seems beyond our ability to carry, that is exactly the time when faith is calling us to surrender our way and trust God’s way. Perhaps our burdens seem too much for us because we were never meant to carry them alone. The struggle can build us up and lead us in the paths we might not ordinarily choose on our own. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Prov. 3:5–6). Trust Jesus to help us carry our load and find rest.

Thanks be to God for the yoke that syncs us with Jesus. Together we can do more than we ask for. Amen.

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