

**A Sermon preached by the Rev. Anne Slakey
July 5, 2026**

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**The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Sacramento, California**

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"Yoke"

"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."

This is surely one of Jesus' best known and most quoted sayings, and no wonder. It is a beautiful invitation to those who are tired and sore at heart, and it promises the transformation that can happen when we come to know Jesus. Yet sometimes what we know best we understand the least, and that is particularly true of the central metaphor "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."

I think many of us understand the yoke as referring to the demands of the Old Law, contrasted with Jesus' yoke. I think that is too limited a reading. It turns out that yoke was a widely used metaphor for a rabbi's particular teaching. If you accept and take up the rabbi's yoke, you commit your self to the disciplines of following his particular teaching. The mistake we make is to contrast Jesus' yoke with the whole of the Old Law, and to think Oh there were so many burdens with the Old Law, but Jesus sets us free free free. Jesus still has a yoke! There are still disciplines we accept when we follow his teaching! Love God. Love your neighbor. Forgive your enemies. Take part in Christian community. Its true, though, that when we learn mercy and lovingkindness from Jesus, we find that the burden is light.

In Judaism today, the yoke is regarded as a good thing, yes, it's a weight, but it makes life better. Yokes are good things. If you've ever carried a weight, and then been shown how to carry it respecting your center of gravity, you'll know what I mean. Yokes were also used for plowing, and in that case, you are joined to another. With the yoke on, Jesus pulls with us. We go further and accomplish more than we could on our own.

Today, we are celebrating another kind of yoke, the yoke of marriage. Gino and Veronica are here to ask God's blessing on an already existing marriage. In

many ways, they've already experienced the joys and the disciplines of pulling together. In asking God's blessing, they are asking Jesus to pull for them and with them.

Yes, the yoke comes with some weight for both. You can no longer do everything you might want to do. You can't take off in a strange direction without consulting your partner. But you can move things you couldn't move on your own, and go further and faster because you pull together.

The good Christian marriages I've seen have one thing in common, they create a holy space where community comes together and finds blessing. In the most usual scenario, this involves creating space for children. But the blessings are not limited to children, and can occur without them; they stretch out to extended family and colleagues and friends. A good marriage blesses us all. So we, the community of St. Paul's, are honored that you asked us to be present today, and we promise to support you.

Jesus invites us today to take his yoke upon us and to learn from him. We can get sore and weary from many things: addiction, resentment, perfectionism, envy, as well as the grind of these difficult times. When we learn from his gentleness, his humility, his love and mercy, we will find rest for our souls. And we will go faster and further than we could alone.