

July 5, 2026  
Proper 9A  
Trinity, St. Louis  
The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

*Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67*

*Psalms 45: 11-18*

*Romans 7:15-25a*

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

In the Name of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Amen.

Today is all about decisions. Over the past several weeks, I've invited us to look deeply into the family album of Abraham and his family. Today, we meet Rebekah, who will become the mother of Esau and Jacob, making her one of our founding mothers, a pivotal figure of a new generation in our family story.

Beginnings, of course, begin with decisions. Sometimes those decisions are ours, sometimes they belong to others. The saga of Rebekah's family begins with her decision to follow Eliezer to meet Isaac. When asked, "Will you go with this man?" she said, "I will." With that decision, Rebekah became a distant yet direct ancestor of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Mt. 1:2). Because of her "yes" you and I are here today.

We will hear more about Rebekah's family in the coming weeks. For this morning, I just want to note the echo and rhyme of motherhood in today's canticle from Julian of Norwich.

*We are all bound to God by nature, and we are bound to God by grace. And this grace is for all the world, because that grace is our precious mother, Christ.*

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Have you ever found yourself in a situation where it seemed that, no matter what decision you made, or how hard you tried, you just couldn't please or persuade someone? This is where we find Jesus this morning.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called on their followers to repent and turn to God. Yet, for both, people used their lifestyles as an excuse to reject them. When John came with his message of austere repentance, people complained. When Jesus came welcoming all and proclaiming God's abundant favor, people dismissed him. Nothing seemed to please this fickle, childish crowd.

Jesus seems to be asking them, *what do you want?* I imagine he knows that they can't answer. Given the political and social stressors in our day, I wonder if we can do any better.

What do we want? In our better moments, I think we want to grow, evolve, and improve. But at the same time, and here's the rub, we also want to be left alone, untouched, and unchanged. Why? Because, change involves loss; change can feel like dying.

There's a song by the late bluesman Albert King that goes:

Everybody wants to hear the truth,  
but yet everybody wants to tell a lie.  
Everybody wants to know the reason without even asking why.  
Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die.<sup>1</sup>

The people who listened to Jesus – then and now – want to improve but not change. This is the struggle that St. Paul lays out for the Romans: “I do not understand my own actions. I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Rom 7:15).

So, what are we to do? If we toss aside the messages of both John the Baptist and Jesus, we're left to our own devices to navigate the road of life through a wilderness of carnival barkers and influencers. Some folks think that if we get scolded enough from the pulpit, things will change. My experience from standing where I am standing and sitting where you are sitting tells me that this is not true.

Who, St. Paul asks, will rescue us from this hamster wheel that leads to nowhere? His answer is simple, “Thanks be to God, *it is* through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Can it really be that easy? Surely there's more to it than that.

Can it be as simple as accepting Jesus' invitation? “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you,” he continues, “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 light.”<sup>2</sup>

For Episcopalians, these verses form part of the so-called “Comfortable Words,” a series of Bible verses that may be said after the Absolution of Sin in Rite I. They are comfortable, and have spawned countless samplers, greeting cards and memes, not to mention some terrific music in Handel's *Messiah*. But do we really buy the notion that Jesus' yoke is easy, and that his burden is light? There's a lot of evidence to the contrary. I mean, look up there. Dressed as a king or not, Jesus is still on the cross.

Some of the difficulty and heaviness that we experience in ourselves and observe in others is our human tendency to try to do it all ourselves, to make our own damn way, rather than nurturing our connection with the One who is the Way, and who

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<sup>1</sup> Albert King (1923-1992), *Everybody Wants to Go to Heaven* (1971).

<sup>2</sup> I am deeply grateful for the thoughts and words of Jan Richardson's 2011 essay, “If the yoke fits.”

walks beside us. Maybe this is what Jesus means: that walking with him isn't necessarily uncomplicated, but if we're focused on our relationship with him, the road before us opens with less resistance and less striving on our part.

I know that some people struggle with the image of a yoke. For many, a yoke indicates bondage or servitude, the lack of freedom and choice. But when I did a Google search of images of yokes, I realized that I had in mind a single-user yoke, such as a water carrier or an enslaved person might use. But more frequently, there are images of double yokes, designed for work in tandem.

Does it change your mental picture to imagine a double yoke as the yoke Jesus was talking about? A yoke that you don't have to pull alone? A yoke that Jesus wears with you; shares with you? A yoke not for servitude or bondage, but a tool of connection, a way of being in relationship with Christ that makes our work easier, not more difficult.

If we nurture this kind of connection with the Christ who labors alongside us, it becomes possible to walk through the complicated realms that our souls inevitably face. This relationship helps us choose between the complications that deepen us and those that deaden us.

When we are yoked with Christ, we are set free to step off the hamster wheel of the world and live no longer for ourselves, but for the good of our fellow Children of God.

Even if the yoke imagery still doesn't sit comfortably with you, it might be worth pondering what you do find yourself attached to. The truth is that we always bind ourselves, however subtly, to something: people, places, things, habits, possessions, beliefs, ways of being in the world.

To what or to whom are you yoked right now? Are these connections you sought out, or have they been placed upon you? Do they deepen you or deaden you? Do they draw you closer to Christ or drive farther away from him? Do they connect you with the power, freedom, and choice that God gives you, or do they diminish your power, freedom, and choice? Decisions, decisions, decisions.

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In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these questions were clustered into what became known as the Serenity Prayer, a foundational prayer in Twelve Step Recovery programs designed for people who were seeking to change those things to which they were yoked. If you know it, I invite you to say it along with me.

God, grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,

and the Wisdom to know the difference.<sup>3</sup>

Just imagine, by taking on the yoke offered by Jesus, you might gain the wisdom to know the difference between what you can and cannot change, and then make wise decisions.

Will Rogers is reputed to have said, “There is nothing as easy as denouncing. It don't take much to see that something is wrong, but it does take some eyesight to see what will put it right again.”

One of the wisest decisions you can make is to vote – prayerfully and faithfully. There is a primary on August 4 when we will vote on four constitutional amendments which will shape, or disfigure, the face of democracy in Missouri. August primaries usually have very low turnout, so a small number of voters could end up making decisions that affect all of us.

If you are not yet registered to vote, or know someone who isn't registered, the deadline for the August primary is next Wednesday, July 8. In next week's eTimes, I will send you a link to a voters' guide from the Public Advocacy office of the diocese.

There is a lot of work for us to do in these increasingly difficult days. The contrast between masked white supremacists marching in Washington, DC and unmasked veterans in Philadelphia protesting fascism yesterday (among many other demonstrations) is a sharp reminder to think about who we're yoked to.

Jesus tells us that Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds, so let us continue to ask for God to grant to the people of our country a zeal for justice and the strength of forbearance, that we may use our liberty in accordance with God's gracious will. (From a Collect for the Nation, BCP, 207.)

Let us pray together the *Thanksgiving for the Nation* which you will find inserted in your service bulletin.

### **Thanksgivings for National Life (BCP, 838)**

#### ***5. For the Nation (slightly edited)***

Almighty God, giver of all good things:

We thank you for the natural majesty and beauty of this land.

They restore us, though we often destroy them.

***Heal us.***

We thank you for the great resources of this nation. They make us rich, though we often exploit them.

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<sup>3</sup> The Serenity Prayer is usually, but not always, attributed to the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892– 1971). This is the short form, adapted by AA and other 12-Step Programs.

*Forgive us.*

We thank you for those who have made this country strong. They are models for us, though we often fall short of them.

*Inspire us.*

We thank you for the torch of liberty which has been lit in this land. It has drawn people from every nation, though we have often hidden from its light, and attempted to hide its light from others.

*Enlighten us.*

We thank you for the faith we have inherited in all its rich variety. It sustains our life, though we have been faithless again and again.

*Renew us.*

Help us, O Lord, to finish the good work you have begun. Strengthen our efforts to blot out ignorance and prejudice, and to abolish poverty and crime. And hasten the day when all your people, with many voices in one united chorus, will glorify your holy Name. *Amen.*