

A Lighter Burden

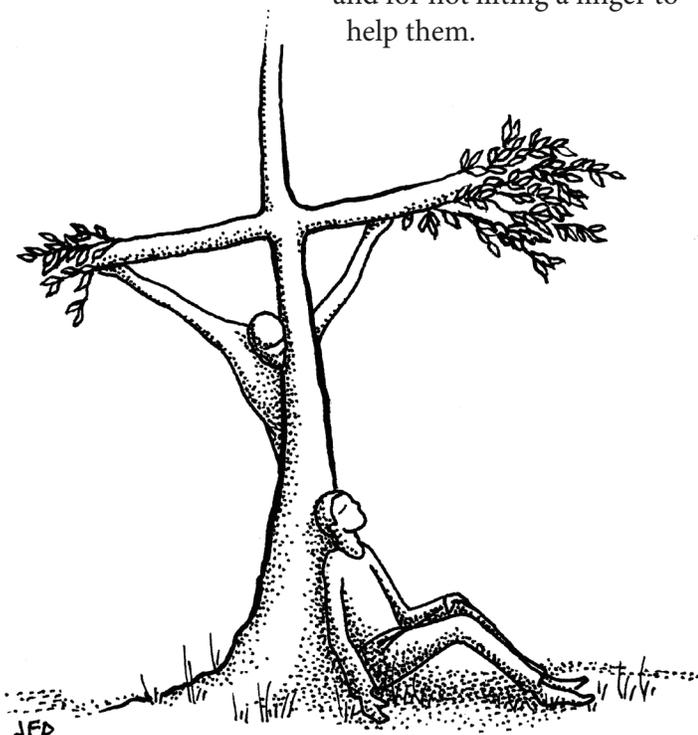
This Week's Readings at Mass

- ▶ Zechariah 9:9-10 - Restoration under the Messiah
- ▶ Romans 8:9, 11-13 - Indwelling of the Spirit
- ▶ Matthew 11:25-30 - Jesus and his Father

For the past several weeks, Jesus gave instructions and warnings about how challenging it is to follow him. Yet today's reading gives the opposite impression: "come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest ... for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Jesus' listeners were familiar with the image of a yoke because they were used to harnessing animals to do work in the field or to pull humans in carriages or cargo on wagons. In Judaism, the yoke was also a metaphor for the religious laws spelled out in the Old Testament.

Over time, religious leaders (mostly the Pharisees) added to the 613 official written laws, creating an oppressive burden for an ordinary Jewish citizen. Several times in Matthew's Gospel Jesus, lashed out at the Pharisees for making it almost impossible (especially for poor people, who were the majority of the population) to live by all the rules, and for not lifting a finger to help them.



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"Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

Sheepish Question:
Whose burden can I relieve this week? Why is he or she so valuable?

In contrast, Jesus simplifies all of his religion's laws into two: love God and love your neighbor as yourself. For people struggling to keep track of hundreds of rules about how to wash your cups and utensils perfectly, what foods can and can't be on a plate together, what kinds of clothing fiber you could or couldn't wear, or what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath, having only those two laws to follow was easy and light in comparison. Instead of having to worry about whether they were breaking any rules, Jesus' disciples could judge any decision with the measure of whether an action expressed love for God, self, and neighbor. *That* was the yoke Jesus was inviting them to carry—not the yoke of the Pharisees who cared more about the letter of the law than the spirit of the law.

Questions of the Week

- 1 What religious rules or laws feel unnecessarily burdensome to you? Why?
- 2 Does the idea of judging all of your actions and decisions by the yoke of Jesus bring you relief? Please explain.