

Central United Methodist Church

3700 Pacific Avenue, Stockton, CA 95204

ORDER OF WORSHIP
6TH Sunday After Pentecost
Sunday, July 9, 2023



GATHERING

PRELUDE

A Hymn Improvisation on 'Ebenezer'
arr. by Jerry Westenkuehler (b.1966)

Erin Wolf (8:30am)
Rebecca Nelson (11:00am)

GATHERING MOMENT

Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)

*CALL TO WORSHIP

Invocation
By Alexis Easton

Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)

Vocals

We come to-gether ground-ed in the love of God, We come to-gether to

Vox.

claim the Spir - it's power.. May we see Christ's face in one an - oth - er,

Vox.

May we be strength - ened for God's pur - pose in this hour.

*OPENING HYMN

God Hath Spoken Through the Prophets

UMH #108

CHILDREN'S MOMENT

Rev. Sungho Lee

PRAYER CARDS COLLECTED

MISSION & MINISTRIES MOMENT

Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)

RITE OF FRIENDSHIP AND A SPECIAL WELCOME TO OUR VISITORS

Nedy Tovera (11:00am)

***PASSING THE PEACE** Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)
(Stand, bow or wave, with the word "Peace be with You!")
All Sing: *And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of God's hand.*

PROCLAMATION AND RESPONSE

SCRIPTURE Genesis 24:34-67 (Pew Bible NRSV, pages 19-20) Joe Krider (8:30am)
Leader: This is the word of God for the people of God. Nedy Tovera (11:00am)
All: Thanks be to God.

***HYMN** *Forth in Thy Name, O Lord* UMH #438

SCRIPTURE Matthew 11:16-30 (Pew Bible NRSV, page 11-12) Joe Krider (8:30am)
Leader: This is the word of God for the people of God. Nedy Tovera (11:00am)
All: Thanks be to God.

NEW MEMBER RECEPTION

SERMON "God Comforts Us" Chungho Lee

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)
After a concern, the worship leader will say "Let us pray to the Lord," and the congregation will reply, "**Lord, hear our prayer!**"
After a joy, the worship leader will say "Let us pray to the Lord," and the congregation will reply, "**Lord, we give thanks!**"

PASTORAL PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER Rev. Sungho Lee
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

THANKSGIVING

WORSHIP WITH OUR TITHES & OFFERINGS Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)

OFFERTORY Erin Wolf (8:30am)
The Prayer Rebecca Nelson (11:00am)
(1998) by C. B. Sager & D. Foster, setting by J. Holstein

***DOXOLOGY** UMH #94
Praise God, From Whom all Blessings Flow
Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below: Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God, the source of all our gifts!
Praise Jesus Christ, whose power up lifts!
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

PRAYER OF DEDICATION Joe Krider (8:30am), Nedy Tovera (11:00am)

SENDING FORTH

***BENEDICTION**

Rev. Sungho Lee

***RESPONSE**

Shalom to You

UMH #666

***Shalom to you now, shalom, my friends.
May God's full mercies bless you, my friends.
In all your living and through your loving,
Christ be your shalom, Christ be your shalom.***

***POSTLUDE**

Toccatina
by Mark Sedio (b. 1954)

Erin Wolf (8:30am)
Rebecca Nelson (11:00am)

The flowers on the altar today are from the Central Flower Committee and are in celebration of all the July birthdays.

* Indicates please stand as you are able.

SERVING YOU TODAY

Rev. Dr. Sungho Lee
Chungho Lee, Guest Speaker
Joe Krider, 8:30am Worship Leader
Nedy Tovera, 11:00am Worship Leader
Ric Campero, Choir Director
Erin Wolf, 8:30am Pianist
Rebecca Nelson, 11:00am Organist/Pianist
David Campero, Livestream
Mark Wharff & Steven Adams, Media
Cherie Hudson, Facilities Coordinator
Rupert Cooper, Audio

TITLE: COMFORT OF GOD

Scripture: Matthew 11:16-30

Introduction

Good morning, everyone.

It's a pleasure to meet you, and I'd like to thank Rev. Sungho Lee and the congregation for allowing me to share this precious pulpit with you.

I am Pastor Sungho Lee's younger brother. I graduated from Methodist Theological University in Korea and served as a youth pastor, education pastor, praise team member, and choir member in several churches in Korea. After I came to America, I worked as an administrator at Korean Presbyterian Church in San Jose for 11 years. During that time, I earned a Master of Divinity at Midwestern Theological Seminary. And I have been on several short-term missions trips and have participated in senior ministry, evangelism parties, mission bazaars, etc.

In fact, when I was a teenager, I had no dreams for the future, I was always full of dissatisfaction and wandered around a lot. At that time, my mother was a missionary in Jeju Island, South Korea, and at her request, I had the experience of helping her for about two and a half years. I was in my early twenties at the time. She was mainly involved in helping the weak and marginalized. Seeing this, I thought that it would be good if I could do something like this in the future, but this thought was not driven by my passionate faith.

After that, I attended a revival and heard a sermon about Jesus coming and being crucified for me, and I was so moved by the fact that God had come to me, I saw myself as a sinner and repented of my sins. So I prayed if God would give me a chance, I would like to do God's work. A few years later, when my pastor told me to study theology, I thought it was God's calling, so I quit my job and studied, and got into Methodist Theological University in Korea.

However, my faith journey focused very much about personal growth of the faith, but I was very disappointed in myself for not being able to fix my character, so I was always wondering how I could overcome my human weaknesses and become more mature in my faith. At that time, I was in a similar struggle to Luther. Luther couldn't solve the problem of persistent sin, even after many confessions, penance, and good works. Then, while studying the book of Romans, he came across Romans 1:17, which says that the righteous are saved by faith, not by their works, as the answer to his problem, and he started the Reformation. But Luther's answer was lacking somewhere, because James 2:17 says that faith without works is dead.

I was a little different from Luther in that I didn't have doubts about my salvation, but I was like Luther in that I was disappointed in myself for not being more mature in my faith, and I was seeking to be more mature and holy, and I would get caught up in the law, and I would try to do more, like fasting and prayer and service, and sometimes I would get satisfied with myself, and then I would get disappointed again.

I wonder if any of you have had a similar experience to mine, or if you have the same thoughts as Luther? Has anyone ever been caught up in the guilt that if I deviate from God's word, I will not be saved, or is in such a state now? If so, let's consider today's scripture together.

Heavy burden and yoke

What does Jesus mean by "heavy burden and yoke" in verses 28 and 29 of today's text? Maybe each person has a different feeling of heavy burden and yoke. So as many ideas as people are going to be connected to these two words. But if you put them together into big categories, I think you can put them together into about three main categories.

1. Physical labor and mental stress at work

First, you can think of the hard physical labor or mental stress you get at your workplace. Yes, how hard is it? When I first came to the U.S., I worked at a construction site while receiving minimum pay. It was very hard work. The workshop was always full of dust, I had to lift heavy things all the time, and sometimes I got my feet poked by nails. Nevertheless, the pay was too little. But I had to work through it, thinking of my family.

And when I was working in the office, there was also a lot of stress there. So, I know what it's like. I prayed as if I were complaining to God, and when I was comforted and prayed by the pastor, I felt like I put down the burden and yoke for a while.

2. Problems that seem unaffordable or unsolvable

Also, when some people face a problem that they cannot afford, they can think of it as a heavy burden and a yoke. How many problems are there in our lives. There are many problems that cannot be solved, such as work, childcare, studies, marriage, and conflicts in various relationships. We pray earnestly to God with this problem and want to put down the burden and yoke. Not long ago, I was in a very difficult situation mentally,

with several issues weighing me down at the same time, and God allowed me to let go of one thing and I was able to hold on again.

3. Weight of sins and guilt

In other cases, people feel their sins as heavy burdens and yoke. Usually, if someone commits small sins, they usually don't realize them well, and then when they realize it through the word of God or through preaching. Some people suffer from a serious sin that they know clearly. And they probably pray deeply to escape that guilt.

God's Response to Our Prayers

In any case, God will certainly listen to our prayers. In the first case, when we complain of stress at work or suffering from hardship, God gives us the strength to overcome it. Or He may give us a way out of it when we have no power to handle it.

In the second case, when we encounter something really hard in life and find ourselves in the same situation as Job, we can go to God and pray, and we can experience God's comfort and gain new strength and courage.

But sometimes God can also help us to solve the problem or even avoid it. Also, if we have a desire in our heart, like Hannah, and it has not been fulfilled. Even in that case, God also grants all such heart wishes. No one can know God's will, but what is clear is that as our father, He will comfort us, give us new strength and power to overcome, and open up new paths.

In the third case, those who realize their sins while reading the Bible or listening to sermons, they can feel their sins as burdens and yoke. And the weight of their sins is so heavy, they may want to repent before God and be freed from the guilt.

But the heavy burdens and yokes that Jesus speaks of in today's passage are completely different from the first two. It's not the physical and mental stresses of work, nor is it the various difficult problems we face in life. Rather, it's the third and final case: the burdens and yokes of sin. But we see Jesus gently telling those who are under these heavy burdens and yokes to come to him, while rebuking some very harshly.

What do You See in Jesus' Work?

Matthew 11, where today's text is located, can be divided into three main sections, with the exception of verse 1. The first part is verses 2 through 15, which at first glance seems to be talking about John the Baptist but is actually describing Jesus' coming into the world and what he does. "Are you the one who is to come?" John the Baptist's question is, "Are you the promised Messiah?" In other words, he's asking, "Who are you?" and Jesus responds, "By what I do now, consider who I am," and then he explains what he did.

"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."(Matthew 11:5)

This answer reminds me of Isaiah's prophecy.

- **"On that day the deaf shall hear the words of a scroll, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see." (Isaiah 29:18)**
- **"To open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." (Isaiah 42:7)**

- **“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;” (Isaiah 61:1)**

If you think about it, most of us are interested in who Jesus is. John the Baptist was, and so were the disciples, but if you go to chapter 16, the very next chapter in today's reading, it's the other way around: Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" This is a question about how people perceive Jesus after seeing what he's doing. The disciples say what they've heard people say. Some say, John the Baptist, or Elijah; others say Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (Matt. 16:14).

Then Jesus asks, who do you say that I am? But the intent of Jesus' question is, who do you think I am by looking at the works that I do? The point here is not a question about identity or who I am, the point is what Jesus has done, which is to say, who do you think I am by looking at the works that I've done? Whether John the Baptist asked the question of Jesus or whether Jesus asked the question of his disciples, the point is to look at what Jesus has done. In the Gospel of John, we have these words. "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe because of the works themselves." (John 14:11).

Why did Jesus emphasize his works in this way?

But if you look a little closer, you'll see that so far this is just a beginning to rebuke Jesus' critics. The second section, verses 16 through 24, is a frightening rebuke of the critics. Jesus said to them “When a great prophet like John the Baptist comes, and you criticize him for being possessed by demons, and the Son of Man for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners, if you were wise, you would have seen what was done and realized whether it was right or wrong. If all the power that I have done with you had been done in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, they would rather have repented, and those cities would have remained to this day (11:24). Those who see what Jesus is doing and do not repent will have a hard time withstanding judgment at the end of time.

The people who are being rebuked by Jesus are the Pharisees, or the scribes of the Pharisees. But why are they being rebuked? It's because they are doing something so starkly different from what Jesus is doing that it's easy to see. If you look at chapter 12, which follows chapter 11 in today's reading, you can quickly see how the Pharisees criticize Jesus. In chapter 12, after Jesus' disciples picked and ate grain on the Sabbath and Jesus healed a man with a crooked wrist, they discussed killing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath law. What was so precious to them? They were legalists. However, the role of the law was only to be a teacher and tutor to lead us to Christ.

“Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be reckoned as righteous by faith.” (Galatians 3:24)

But the Pharisees made up 613 commandments and regulations in addition to the law given by God, and emphasized following and keeping them as if they were the right way to live their faith. What was wrong with them? Was it wrong for them to be stricter in their faith? Was it wrong for them to be passionate about God? If we look for the answer in the words of Jesus, it is a heavy burden and yoke. These ordinary people were the ones who needed to have their faith cared for. But the Pharisees were treating them as sinners and guiltily by putting the heavy burden and yoke of the law on them. Not only that, but they were foolishly blocking the easy way for the ordinary person to get to God, making it impossible for them to go even if they wanted to. Crucially, they did not treat people with the love of God. God doesn't just look at people's deeds, He looks deeply into their circumstances, their hearts, and their motivations. But legalists only look at deeds and their consequences. So God observes people with a deeper understanding, so His attitude toward them is different, and it brings people back to God.

On the other hand, what did Jesus do? What do you see when you hear Jesus summarize his work in verse 5: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them." (11:5). I can see life springing up here and there. I can see people who were oppressed, who were down, who were sick, who were diseased, who couldn't get out, who were like zombies. But now they heard the word of life from Jesus Christ and taking His hand and being lifted up, being washed, being set free, being made alive. What Jesus did was not just a good deed, but the love of God in it. We who receive it know that it is God's Grace - God's Grace given freely. God gave the law through Moses, but now he gives Grace through Jesus Christ.

"The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)

As Luther discovered, it is faith that saves us, but it is a faith that is not merely an intellectual assent. It is a faith with real works, and those works are not the works of the law but the works of God's love. It is the grace of God that flows from a loving heart that understands our condition, forgives us, and loves us. It is by that grace that Jesus became the friend of sinners and took away their heavy burdens and yokes. Every act of grace in which the blind sees, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the gospel is proclaimed is an act of grace that saves us.

What should we realize from what Jesus did and said? Did Jesus come to abolish the law? No, he didn't. In Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus says this "17 Think not that I am come to abolish the law or the prophets; for I am not come to abolish, but to fulfill: 18 For I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Jesus is not trying to abolish the law but is criticizing the legalism that makes people wrongfully guilty. Could it be that Jesus was saying to the Pharisees, "Don't you see what I have done and know who I am? Don't you see your neighbor, they are falling down beside you and groaning, so I am giving them life, restoring them, bringing them back to God, and don't you see this?" Could it be that he was saying this?

Jesus' emphasis was not on the 613 works of the law that the Pharisees had created. Rather, he emphasized what he did with grace and love to save, restore, and draw to God those whom the Pharisees had condemned as sinners and whom they had not dealt with or treated as people. He emphasized that the law cannot save us, but God's grace and love can. That is the work of Jesus as the Messiah and that is the will of God.

Now the third section, verse 25 through the end, is where Jesus calls and invites the childlike people, the common people who have no knowledge or ability. These are the people who are treated as sinners by the priests, scribes, and Pharisees, so they don't feel guilty because of their own sins, but because of the guilt imposed by the legalists, and they are burdened with heavy burdens and yokes. Jesus calls these people and removes their heavy burdens and yokes. God forgives and lovingly accepts anyone, no matter how great the sin, if he repents and returns. God's word is a life-saving word, so it does not condemn and yoke people, branding them as sinners.

So Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (v. 29). Jesus doesn't say, "Learn from me, for I am the Messiah." He doesn't say learn who Jesus is, he says learn what Jesus did. So rather than asking who Jesus is, we need to realize who Jesus is by what he did. We need to learn His Grace and Love, which gives life-saving things he has done for us. Isn't that what it means to be his disciple?

Jesus' critics, the Pharisees, accused him of being a friend of sinners. But this is a wonderful compliment: Jesus really is a friend of sinners. Why did Jesus become a friend of sinners? So that he could know their life situation and difficulties and restore them as children of God. Therefore, all of us who confess that we are sinners should come to Jesus, respond to his invitation, and be free from all condemnation. Jesus will not

only be our friend, but he will also restore your life with His peace and comfort. For this purpose, Jesus willingly became a friend of sinners.

Conclusion

Now let me finalize: Jesus came to give us life, and to remove all obstacles to that life being free to worship and praise God. He came to show us that legalism is a great sin. They bound our wrists, blindfolded our eyes, and led our lives down the wrong path. However, Jesus came to set us free from the bondage of sin and legalism.

So, all sinners are invited to come. Even those whom the law says are sinners, let them all come. Come to Jesus, he knows the Father's will and has done for it. And by God's grace and love, you can now have new life and rest.

The rest that Jesus gives is in God, so this is the peace and comfort that God gives to those who have had a hard and difficult life. It is true peace and comfort. Jesus invites those who are carrying such burdens and yokes to come. He invites them to come and have their sins forgiven, to be set free from their burdens and yokes, to be given new life and rest. If you are still carrying heavy burdens and yokes, I invite you to respond to Jesus' invitation and come. Through His free Grace and Love, may you lay down your burdens and yokes and find new life and have it more abundantly.



THE OFFICE

The office area is closed on Saturdays and Sundays. If you need to make copies or need to be in the office area, please come by during the week. It is best to make an appointment as we are short-staffed and may be in a meeting, on lunch or running errands.

Also, regarding the buildings. The buildings are kept locked during the week for the safety of the staff, nursery school teachers and children, and groups that use the facilities during the week. The office and the buildings are closed on Saturdays. On Sunday, only buildings that are being used are unlocked – usually the Knoles Building and the Sanctuary. Again, the other buildings are kept locked for the safety of staff and others on campus. We have had several unpleasant encounters with some of the homeless on our campus and we need to be sure that everyone feels safe while on our facility. Thank you for understanding. If you have any questions, please contact Susie Wanden at swanden@cumcstockton.org.

SUMMER BIBLE STUDY

Join Pastor Lee's Summer Bible Study Small Group during June, July, and August on Sundays in the Fellowship Hall following the 11:00am worship service (except for the Sundays when Book Club meets, and Annual Conference happens). The study is open to everyone. Come to the Fellowship Hall and learn about the leadership of Samuel, King Saul, and King David in the Bible.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING CLASS

First Wednesday of August at 6pm via Zoom. If you are a Committee Chair and have not attended this is your last chance. As Committee Chair you are required to attend this one-hour training.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON BOOK GROUP

The book club summer read is *The All-Girl Filling Station's Last Reunion* by Fannie Flagg. Discussion will be at dinner Friday, July 21, at 6pm at the home of Elizabeth Van Eerde. Questions or to RSVP email Elizabeth by July 14 at emve@comcast.net.
