

Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30  
Leaning on the Shoulders of Jesus  
(a sequel to Standing on the Shoulders of Giants)

What at an anniversary it was last Sunday. For those of you who are visiting this morning or new to the community, last Sunday we celebrated the 142<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the founding of this church.

Every Sunday we light the candles to remind us of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst, but the last Sunday was one of those occasions where the presence of the Spirit was palpable throughout the day. Some of you felt it in the rousing sermon Pastor David preached, while some of you felt it in the strong sense of community coming together in celebration; and this sense of community stretched beyond time to bring the presence of those who are no longer with us in body, but they certainly were in spirit.

Some of you, like me, may have felt the movement of the Holy Spirit in the unfolding of the day's events. In his sermon, Pastor David reminded us that to know who we are, we need to know on whose shoulders we stand. Our collective identity is shaped by our collective memory of those who have gone before. Lifting up the many names on whose shoulders we stand, over the 142 year-long history of this church, from its very beginning to the most recent and current members, Pastor David concluded with a reminder that we are now the shoulders on which the next generation stands.

After he preached, we honored David by recognizing him as our Pastor Emeritus, for his almost 20 years of ministry in our midst; this act was an expression of our acknowledgment that we stand on his shoulders.

Then, the worship moved to the baptism of our newest and the youngest member. We sung "Child of blessing, Child of promise, baptized with the Spirit's sign" and welcomed into the church family a disciple of the next generation. I can only attribute this timing to the movement of the Holy Spirit in this household of God. When Shiloh came up to me a few weeks ago and asked me to baptize her, I'm pretty sure she wasn't thinking "wow, it would be cool to be baptized on the church's 142<sup>nd</sup> anniversary." The Spirit made it happen, and not just for kicks, but to tell us something. God is speaking.

After the worship service, we gathered around the old apricot tree and listened to Dr. Tom Swetnam explain to us how the tree, as old as the church, has witnessed the history (and the

story) of this church. We dedicated this tree as the “Founder’s Tree” and took a group photo around it. The fact we decided not to cut down the tree, even though it died several years ago, but to preserve it as the “Founder’s Tree” is an act of acknowledgment and honoring of our past, as well as an expression of our trust that the tree shall continue to witness the life and work of this church into the future; that our future is a continuation of the past of which this tree is a witness.

Then we moved inside to the original sanctuary, where a team of members and friends of the church had put together a display of photographs and items that told the history of the church for all to remember or, if you are new, to learn for the first time.

These unfolding events of the whole day that Sunday, felt to me like a tribute to our collective past shaping our identity and a charge for us to live into the future; an invitation from the Holy Spirit who continues to nudge and guide us.

God speaks to us through the Scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit so we can hear. So also, God speaks to us through these events in the life of our church family that unfold by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to pay attention to the story of our life together as a church, not just of the past but also to what is happening here and now in this place. God is still speaking, and we are to listen and discern what God, through the Spirit, is calling us to do.

As I read the Scripture for today, these images from the last Sunday came flooding in. Psalm 145 which Susanna read to us reminds us that we are to give thanks and bless God, because God is God of all generations. God who was with our forefathers and foremothers in faith is the God with us here and now and the God who will be with the future generations.

The life in this Valley has changed over the years and will continue to change, but the kingdom of God is an everlasting kingdom, the psalmist reminds us, and we as a church are called to make that manifest in our ever-changing world.

And we can do so with hope, the Psalmist says, for the Lord is good to all, God is faithful in all that God promises, supporting the weak and raising up those who are humble.

So, here we are, standing on the shoulders of giants, upheld by God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, how are we to live this moment and into the future?

By leaning on the shoulder of Jesus, by taking his yoke upon ourselves and learning from Jesus. We call those who have sustained the church and carried on the work to this day “giants,”

but they were really “little people,” who were humble and knew their need to rely on Jesus. They took Jesus’s yoke upon themselves and learned from him.

In Matthew’s passage today Jesus gives thanks to God that God chose to reveal God’s wisdom not to God’s know-it-all but to those who knew their need to rely on God for everything, like an infant. He came to those who struggle with faith, to those who need to lean on his shoulder. To them Jesus came, with his easy yoke and light burden, to empower them to be his disciples.

In Judaism, yoke is a metaphor of servitude and therefore of obedience. To take upon the yoke of Jesus is to listen to his words, God’s words, and to obey them. Yoke was also used to teach. You would yoke the animal who was already trained, side by side with the animal that was untrained, so it could learn the way. So, we are to be giants yoked with Jesus, to learn from him his gentleness and humility of heart. We are to be gentle and humble giants of God.

In today’s passage from Matthew, Jesus talks about “this generation,” the generation of his day. God sent to them John the Baptist, the prophet with the urgent call to repent! He lived in the desert and lived on locust. While many who were suffering under the heavy burden of religious obligations listened to him and was baptized in the Jordan river, the learned and the powerful in their community rejected the prophet, saying he had demons.

Then God sent Jesus, who came into the world, eating and drinking with the poor and lowly folks, tax collectors and sinners, and those in the authority condemned him, ultimately to death.

And Jesus promises his yoke is easy and his burden is light; obviously he did not mean that to be an easy and care-free life if his life ended on the cross. His yoke is easy, and his burden is light, because it leads us to live the life God created us for. Learning his ways and obeying his words will lead to a life filled with purpose and meaning, to live as God’s children. To be a light in the world that reflects THE Light of the world.

What would Jesus compare our generation to? In the history of this church, there were many turns when people rejected the teaching of the church. Maybe there were time the church did not get it right. Disciples of Jesus who worked with him often didn’t get it right. But God can make giants of little people who are faithful, who trust in the power of the Spirit to lead us to right actions, who is gentle and humble in heart.

As we continue our work and welcome more opportunities to serve this Valley, let us remember to lean on the shoulders of Jesus and to learn from him. Let us listen not to the voice of the haughty but to the voice that speak of grace, mercy, compassion, for that is the voice of Christ, who is gentle and humble in heart.

Now and into the future, may we continue to extend the radical hospitality of Jesus in the everlasting kingdom of God, right here in this ever-changing world. Amen