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Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Since it's the weekend of the Fourth of July, I've had patriotism on my mind. We Codys are hosting four college students from France this weekend and we took them to the Glencoe Parade and Fireworks and fed them American food on Independence Day. Claire and Mae wore their American flag shirts, and at grace Jason thanked God for our country. I've certainly spent the weekend enjoying being American, and the great weather helped!

I was baffled last week to hear that some campaign operatives for Barack Obama had said some things leading up to Independence Day that criticized rival John McCain's patriotism, or at least questioned it. Obama ended up denouncing the remarks and promising never to criticize anyone's patriotism. Questioning McCain's loyalty to this country, first of all, is ridiculous. Next thing

you know someone's going to be questioning his faith in God...but let's hope not.

McCain, of all people, has given his entire career in service to the United States.

It's been his passion and his calling. He's served in various elected offices,

written and defended laws, even crossed the aisle for the greater good. And if

that doesn't count for patriotism I don't know what does. Certainly Obama's

patriotism has also been questioned. The embarrassing argument about

whether or not Obama wears a flag lapel pin is what comes to mind, as though

the wearing of a pin makes someone's patriotism more real.

In my opinion, *anyone* who gives up sleep, family, privacy, routine, and sanity to

campaign for President is patriot enough. Let it alone!

But people are funny. We're always looking for an easy excuse to get people

boxed in. Sometimes people's minds are made up anyway, and we try to fit in

the data to prove what we already believe about a situation or a person. If

there's something about a person you don't like or trust, then just *find* something

to pick at.

Have you heard the one about the bishop and the old retired priest going fishing?

Well, the bishop and the old retired priest enjoyed getting together every once in a while on a Monday morning when the lake was quiet to go fishing. They were both pretty crusty old curmudgeons and were pretty set in their ways on these fishing trips.

When the new rector showed up at the local parish church, they were a little taken aback when he asked the two of them if he could come along fishing with them. Surely, he said, he could learn a thing or two from them. The two older guys harrumphed (privately). They had expected to support this new rector...sort of...from a distance. But now he wanted to go fishing with them? What could they say?

So Monday dawned, and the three gathered their stuff into the boat: the tackle, the rods, the sun-hats, the bait. The two old guys were grouchy: why had they let this new whipper-snapper come along? They were sure he would ruin

everything. And all-be-darned, after they'd pushed out to the middle of the lake, they realized they'd forgotten their lunch coolers on the shore.

The new rector laughed it off. "Just a second," he said, "I'll go get the lunches."

So he jumped out of the boat and went over to the shore, walking across the water.

"Look at that," said the bishop, "That guy doesn't even know how to swim."

Jesus said to the crowd, "To what will I compare this generation?" And then he compares them to bratty kids: You wouldn't play with me! You never want to be "It"! You're a crybaby! Jesus goes on to point out how the people questioned John the Baptist's sanity because John fasted in the wilderness. And now the people question Jesus because he eats and drinks.

They said John the Baptist must have a demon because he was an ascetic; now they say Jesus is a glutton and a drunkard because he's not an ascetic. With

this generation you can't win for losing. Everyone is a crusty curmudgeon who looks for litmus tests of loyalty or faithfulness. No one ever measures up.

Our generation is not too different. While it's some consolation that Jesus' generation was also grumpy and mean-spirited, it's doesn't really vindicate ours.

The wise and intelligent ones of every generation can always find fault. It's easy to find fault.

My husband Jason's lab-mate in the chemistry PhD program in the 90's was Ramjee Shah. Ramjee worked all hours trying all kinds of wild experiments, most of which didn't work.

Other grad students would come by his exhaust hood and look at his flasks and shake their heads. "How is that going to work?" "What are you thinking?" Or they'd simply roll their eyes. Ramjee said once to Jason: it's always easier to be the critic. It's much harder to step in there and do the hard work. So Ramjee pressed on.

Jesus offers us his yoke. He expects that those who will take up the yoke will already be carrying heavy burdens and will be world-weary. Jesus expects that the people who take up his offer will have lived through the never-ending scrutiny and negativity of the current generation. Jesus is not just saying: keep a stiff upper lip! Just lump it! Jesus recognizes the heavy load.

It's amazing that some of these presidential candidates seem to keep taking the criticism and somehow keep on bouncing back with a smile. I guess they have to. The new rector in the fishing joke just bounced out of the boat and strolled across the water no matter what his fishing companions thought.

But it's not so easy to bounce. I'm assuming that most of us, or all of us, have found ourselves in the position of being put down or scorned for doing what was authentic for us or what we knew is right. Maybe sometimes God gives us the grace or the infantile obliviousness to bounce back with a smile. Sometimes we

can see that we're the character in a joke and take the criticism with a sense of humor. But most of the time being the recipient of eye-rolling and name-calling is tiring and it hurts. Especially during times when you can't win for losing, when you're damned if you do damned if you don't.

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."

Jesus is offering to shoulder the yoke with us. Picture a yoke for two oxen. He recognized that you can't please everyone...in fact, most of the time people will be operating from a state of their own weariness and grouchiness. The best we can do is press on like Ramjee Shah and do what we know will bring light and life to the world. We Christians can close our eyes and imagine Jesus there in the yoke with us, pressing on. Jesus said, "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

In Christian community we are also in a position to bear one another's burdens.

In Christ we are to build one another up, not tear one another down. In Christ we

are to encourage one another rather than drag each other under. Jesus' yoke is God's help.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? That is to say, "Will you be a 'good news' person? Will you be an encourager? Will you seek to counter your own grumpiness with generosity and be a Light-bearer for the sake of the world?" We will, with God's help.