

## God Still with Us

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus accuses his critics of having the Goldilocks syndrome. I'm sure you remember the story:

When Goldilocks entered the home of the three bears, she tried to rest on all three of their beds. But Papa Bear's bed was too hard, Mama Bear's bed was too soft, and even though Baby Bear's bed was "just right", she was too big for it, and sadly, she broke it. Poor Goldilocks! She never could be happy.

This is what Jesus says of the people he encounters in Matthew, chapter 11. He says they are never happy with God, or with his servants, because they never meet the people's expectations. If the people play the flute, they expect God's servants to dance, and if the people cry, they expect God's servants to grieve.

Then Jesus gives two concrete examples. First, he says when God sent John the Baptist, certain people complained he was too strict, because he fasted, and would not drink wine. Then when God sent Jesus, the very same people complained he ate too much food, he drank too much wine, and worst of all, he ate with sinners.

Jesus says – You people are like Goldilocks. You are never happy. You are never happy with God, or his servants.

It's true. Right? We're hard to please. Not that it's God's job to please us. But even so, let's say we pray for nice weather. Yet, if the sun shines too many days, and yards and crops begin to suffer, we pray for rain. But, if it rains for over a week, and the ground is too soaked, we pray for the rain to stop.

What we are really asking God is to make everything perfect for us. We want everything to be "just right" in our lives. We want God to take away everything hard, every struggle. But if you recall, God

already did that once, didn't he, in the Garden of Eden. Everything was good there. In fact, it was very good, until we sinned.

So, in the beginning, when God made things "just right" and "very good", we, like Goldilocks, broke it. Can we ever be happy?

About five years ago, I came to know a woman who was totally confined to her bed. She had severe Multiple Sclerosis, and it had over the course of many years taken the strength out of her body. She was not a member of ULC, but someone asked me to visit her, because her congregation was between pastors.

We talked, read Scripture, prayed, and I served her Communion. Despite MS, she was a happy person, and she began to witness to me about how Jesus spent every day with her, and how it was his presence and his love, that made her happy, that made her life good. She was happy because the Lord was with her.

This is what Jesus is asking us to discover at the end of our reading from Matthew. First, he says – *Come to ME, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.* Here Jesus reminds us that God sent him into the world to be present with us, and to help us through hardships in life.

So, is it possible to be happy, to find peace and rest, amidst the hardships and struggles in life? Jesus emphatically says – Yes! It is possible because you are not alone in your struggles, Jesus is with us. As we learn in Matthew, chapter 1, at Christmas, he is *God with us*, and if God is with us, we can be happy.

That is what the woman was witnessing about. Of course, she was not happy that she had MS. But she was very happy to discover that Jesus had come to her amidst her greatest burden in life. She was not alone there, because Jesus was "God still with her", and he made her happy, and he brought her peace.

Secondly, Jesus goes on to say – *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* Here Jesus reminds us that we are tied to him. That's what a yoke does, it ties two oxen together, so they can stay close to each other, so they can work together.

So, Jesus is inviting you to see that his life is tied to yours. He wants you to embrace the idea that he has come into the world to be tied to you, yoked to you, to stay close to you through both the good and the hard times of life. It is good to be tied to Jesus, because he is gentle, and he gives you peace.

Being tied to Jesus amidst a pandemic, amidst racial tensions in our country, amidst burying our little 8-year-old, Aurora, this week, means Jesus stays close to us through these hard times. Jesus is “God still with us”, so that even through such challenging times, our weary souls find rest, and yes, we can be happy.

Third, Jesus says – *My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.* Here Jesus reminds us that God did not send him into the world to be one more burden for us. Even though Jesus is not here to take away struggles, he is not here to make our lives harder either, but rather to lighten our loads, and to enlighten our lives.

In other words, you are not bearing the weight of your life and your struggles all by yourself. In fact, Jesus is helping you bear them. He is helping you pull through them. He is helping you overcome them. Today and every day, the Lord Jesus is doing the heavy work, helping you with whatever is burdening you.

My friends in Christ, these are words we need to hear amidst the coronavirus, amidst racial issues in our country. We are living through some very strange times. Can we get through them? Yes, Jesus who is “God still with us” will help us to carry such heavy burdens, and his presence and help will make us happy.

The death of precious 8-year-old, Aurora, reminds us just how hard life can be. What is a heavier burden than the death of a loved one? What is a heavier burden than the death of a child, a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, and a niece? Yet, Jesus is God still with us even through a hard time like this.

In fact, Jesus is not only God still with us, but he is tied to us and stays close to us, through this hurtful and sad moment for Aurora's family, and us too. We can't undo the sadness and the hurt, but we do have a Lord who comes alongside us to be with us, and to help us carry this hard, heavy burden.

This is where simple faith in God is critical. Even though Aurora is not with us, we believe that through Jesus, God is still with her, and that through Jesus, God is also still with us. We rest on this promise, and we can be happy too, not because Aurora has died, but because she is with Jesus, and that he is also with us.

What Jesus suggests today, is that he willingly meets us in the burdens of our lives. We find him there, where he has tied himself to us, so he can help us through everything in life. Look for peace and happiness there with Jesus, right amidst your life. Such life is rarely burden free, but Jesus will lighten things for you.

And if we really are like Goldilocks, as Jesus seems to suggest, let us stop our search for happiness, because we know where to find it. We find happiness, we find all things "just right" and "very good", in the Lord Jesus, who says – *Come to me*. So, what are you waiting for? Go to him! Go to him now and every day.

He is and always will be God still with you. Amen.