

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Year A - Proper 9, Text: Matthew 11:25-30
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In Jesus' day, many within the Jewish community were waiting for the return of an ancient figure who would proclaim the breaking in of the long-awaited Messianic Age. Who would that person be? Abraham? Moses? David? Elijah? The majority thought that it would be Elijah, basing their hopes on Malachi 4:5–6. (See also Matthew 16:14; 17:3–4, 10–13; 27:47.)

When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, crowds came from Jerusalem and the Judean countryside to hear him (Mark 1:5). The response that John sought from his hearers was not personal admiration, but entry into the kingdom that he proclaimed. He pointed to Jesus as the Messiah (John 1:24–28).

Verses 11:16–17: After John came Jesus. How did the crowds react to their respective teachings? Jesus answers this question in 11:16–19, one of His many vivid parables. He speaks of groups of young musicians (“children”) sitting in a market place and calling out to each other to make suggestions about what kind of music they should play or what songs that they should sing. Should it be happy music that would inspire their hearers to dance as at a wedding, or songs that would move them to mourn and grieve as at a funeral? However, their hearers did not respond to either kind of music in an appropriate way. It was virtually impossible to please their hearers, for nothing suited them.

Verses 11:18–19: John and Jesus were heralds of a single kingdom — but they did so in ways that were as different in tone as funerals (John) and weddings (Jesus). The first group in verse 11:17 represents those who rejected John for his asceticism. The second group in verse 11:17 represents those who rejected Jesus for sharing table fellowship with those whom the religiously observant despised.

When John came fasting and calling to repentance (verse 9:14), his hearers thought him mad, demon-possessed, obsessed with discipline, and impossibly ascetic. But when Jesus, the Son of Man, came feasting and inviting His hearers to walk through life in

joy (verses 9:14–15), they looked on Him as a glutton and a drunkard, guilty of keeping bad company, and anything but spiritual. “This generation” (verse 11:16) found fault with both, took offense at both, and rejected the call of both.

The closing section of 11:19 reads, “Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” The parallel passage in Luke 7:35 reads, “Nevertheless, wisdom is vindicated by all her children.” In Luke’s version, John and Jesus are the children of wisdom. In Matthew, the works of Jesus the Messiah are those of divine wisdom.

Matthew is stating that Jesus Himself is the embodiment of divine wisdom; note Matthew 12:42 and 1 Corinthians 1:24. That divine wisdom demonstrated itself in Jesus’ manner of life; He taught and walked the way of a servant-without-limit, full-time, all the way to giving up life on a cross. More, He calls His brothers and sisters to follow His example in all that they think, say, and do.

Verses 11:25–27: In these verses, the “wise and intelligent” are the scribes and Pharisees who reject Jesus’ teachings and the significance of His actions. However, there are those who accept Jesus’ teachings and the significance of His actions; these are referred to as infants — the childlike. The Father’s revelation in relation to Jesus is granted to those who are open to receive it but denied to those who are spiritually and intellectually arrogant.

Jesus is able to reveal the truths that He does for the simple reason that He is God’s Son, and there is a perfect reciprocity of knowledge between Jesus and His Father. The final section of 11:27 should not be interpreted as saying that Jesus wishes to reveal His Father’s truth only to a select few, but not to humanity at large.

Verses 11:28-30: This message is found only in Matthew; it reflects the contents of Sirach 51:23, 26, an apocryphal writing. The weary and those carrying

heavy burdens are those weighed down by efforts to keep the law as expounded by the scribes and Pharisees. Their “yoke,” the lifestyle to which they submit, is a burden. However, those who take upon themselves the yoke of the way of life taught and modeled by Jesus (the servant life) experience spiritual rest; note Jeremiah 6:16.

Jesus’ desire is to free us from bondage to our inner whims and the seductions and will of the world around us. Ultimately, we find life by giving it away in the service of others. He who at Nazareth made yokes for cattle, making sure that they did not hurt the animals on which they were placed, tells His disciples that His yoke will enable them to bear life’s burdens without strain or pain. Hearts can rest in God above while heads and hands are engaged in serving the world below. The gracious invitation is to “come,” “take,” “learn,” and “find.”

As H. R. Mackintosh wrote:

“No one ever lived who accomplished a work so great as that of Jesus Christ. No one ever bore the burden of so tremendous a mission; yet the impression conveyed by His life is one of repose and tranquility. So deep and unshakable was His confidence in God Whom He knew as His Father that He could invite the whole world to come and share His rest.”

The following prayer (from the Anglican Prayer Book) contains food for thought and inspirational guidelines for our walk through life.

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of faith of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that Your hand is leading us, and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.