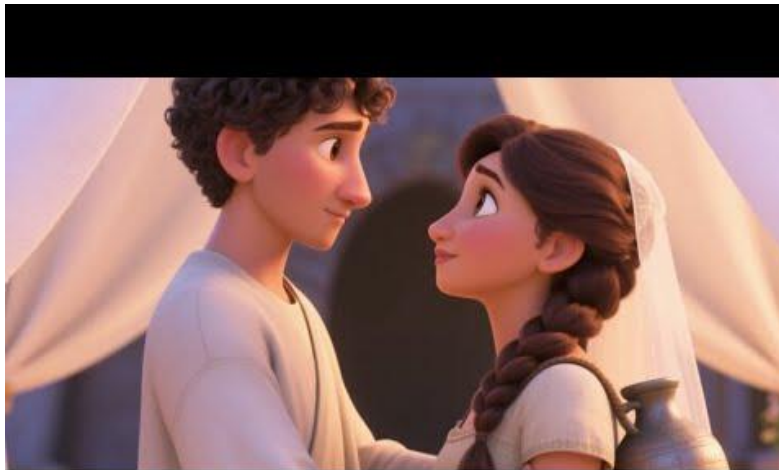




Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9)
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
July 5, 2026



Rebekah Becomes Isaac's Wife



The Virginia Declaration of Rights, published in June 1776, declared, “that the people of this colony can no longer groan under the heavy yoke of British tyranny.” In his 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine wrote, “‘tis our duty to throw off the yoke of Britain.” Upon the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, John Adams wrote to Abigail, “It has been a severe Trial, but the Yoke is broken and we are Free.”

On this 4th of July weekend, as our nation celebrates 250 years of independence and the throwing off of the yoke of King George III, it is ironic and challenging to hear the words of King Jesus, “Take my yoke upon you.” However, a closer look at the differences between these two yokes will underscore the grace of Jesus’ invitation.

The Declaration of Independence lists 27 grievances against King George as proof of “the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States,” which was a heavy yoke. At the conclusion of this catalog of complaints, Thomas Jefferson asserts, “In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.”

Compare the character of Jesus who says, “Take my yoke upon you.” Instead of taking from the people, Jesus gives rest. Instead of acting as a tyrant, Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. Instead of “a history of repeated injuries and usurpations” (a charge against King George), Jesus offers rest for the soul. Instead of a yoke of oppression and tyranny, Jesus offers an easy yoke and a light burden.

The idea of an easy and light yoke seems counterintuitive. The Lord commanded Jeremiah to make a yoke of straps and bars, put it on his neck, and speak to King Zedekiah, “Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people and live” (Jeremiah 27:2, 8, 12). The Lord spoke through Isaiah, “Is this not the fast that I choose; to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?” (Isaiah 58:7). Peter addressed the Jerusalem council and asked, “Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10). Paul warned the believers in Galatia, “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

Those verses call to mind a single yoke. Consider, however, Jesus' yoke to be a double yoke which has these advantages: to lighten the load; to enhance teamwork and direction; to share the burden between a seasoned animal that can teach a younger animal how to work properly. This helps explain Jesus' description of his yoke as easy, for the Greek adjective can be understood to mean fit for use, well-fitting, mild, and pleasant. Jesus' easy yoke stands in sharp contrast to a yoke as a metaphor for oppression or a harsh, legalistic system.

Jesus' invitation in verses 28-30 is given in the form of three imperatives: come, take, learn. Accepting his invitation and obeying his command brings rest for one's soul and implies a loyal and faithful obedience. Such an expected obedient response stands in sharp contrast to Jesus' generation which he compared to children sitting in the marketplace, "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn" (Matthew 11:17). Jesus' imperative is an opportunity to respond in a very different manner from those who scoffed at John, "He has a demon," and criticized Jesus as "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Matthew 11:18-19).

In the appointed epistle lesson for this Sunday, Romans 7:15-25a, Paul describes life under the yoke of the law, which is controlled and abused by sin. He writes, "For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members" (Romans 7:22-23). In contrast, Jesus' easy yoke and light burden offer freedom to live in him and for God, emancipated from the oppressive yoke of legalism and sin. On this 4th of July weekend, the gospel lesson calls us to a life of true freedom, free to love and serve God and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Questions for reflection on Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

1. How is Jesus's promise of rest for your souls at the same time a call to discipleship?
2. In what ways are we as individuals and the church like those people described by the children in the marketplace, who did not respond to the call to dance and to mourn?
3. What keeps you from shouldering Jesus's yoke with him?