

Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

These words have been a touchstone for people down through the centuries and they still have the power to comfort us.

It's easy to read this as direction to simply cast our cares upon God and everything will miraculously be alright, while in fact Jesus is not so much offering us an easy way out as he is offering us a choice: what do you choose to be yoked to?

Do you choose to be yoked to the world? Or will you choose to be yoked to God? Your choice will lead to very different journeys.

When we are yoked to the world our allegiance is to maintaining the status quo. It is wrapped up in power, control, and status – and the belief 'might makes right.'

When we are yoked to God our allegiance is to love – just love – loving God with all our heart and all our soul and all mind and all our strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

This image of the yoke has lost some of its evocative nature to us in the modern world, but would have been a powerful illustration within the agrarian culture of the first century.

A yoke is a wooden frame by which two draft animals are joined together in order to work. It is a device that shifts weight and transfers energy to make things easier to pull – a burden easier to bear.

When Jesus offered his yoke as an alternative to being yoked to the world, he wasn't offering to take away all our burdens – he was inviting us to let him help carry them. To truly cast our cares on God's shoulders.

The word yoke also has another meaning, one that would not have been lost on a people who lived under the rule of the Roman Empire. A yoke can mean oppression, bondage, and servitude.

To be yoked to the world is to acquiesce to participation in the systems of the world that privilege some and subjugate others.

To be yoked to God is to commit to overturning the tables domination and to the balancing of the scales of justice.

When we are yoked to God above all else, when we make God and God's commandments the true center of our lives, then it makes it easier to begin disengaging from the yoke of the world.

Because like it or not, most of us are yoked to the world to varying degrees.

But as German writer and natural philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote, "The greatest thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving."

When we choose to yoke ourselves to God, our movement is ever Godward. We don't call it a faith journey for nothing.

Jesus continues to offer us this choice every day of our lives, at every turn on this journey – and when we choose him, then he will take the weariness and heavy burdens that the world lays on our shoulders and he will give us rest.

My prayer today is that we **will** choose to yoke ourselves to God, and that we are able to live into the word of our opening Collect today:

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.