

I think the theme of this Sunday's lectionary might be "The yoke's on you!"

There's a lot of references to this farming tool, used most often with oxen. Our lessons today talk about the yoke as a farming implement. Elisha was tilling the ground when Elijah threw his mantle over his shoulders. Yokes help farmers harness the power of several animals to work as one unit. They also help younger animals learn their tasks by connecting them to older experienced animals.

Jesus is a bit more subtle. He's using connection to teach his disciples what and who they need to let go of in order to follow him down the road to Jerusalem. In his book *Velvet Elvis*, Rob Bell talks about yoking as being the teachings of a rabbi. To be a disciple meant that you would be covered in the 'dust' of your rabbi. You would have the dust of the road upon you as you traveled along. You also would be 'dusted' with wisdom as you "took on the yoke" of your master.

In our individual-is-all US of A, being yoked to something has usually pointed to circumstances of subservience, oppression, and/or captivity. Independence is what we're all about, right?

We're about to celebrate the 243st anniversary of breaking the yoke between us and England in just a few days! As we do that, we should also remember that there were people yoked in slavery who have never been given their due in the development of this nation. If the yoke really IS on you, something is horribly amiss. Independence Day should have its solemn moments along with the fireworks John Adams hoped for.

On the other hand, my mind goes back to Elijah and Elisha and the passing of the mantle from one to the other. There is a way that being yoked to someone is beneficial. That yoking is currently understood as mentoring. Whether you are in the business of business or you are in the business of spiritual maturity, mentoring (or coaching) creates strong, competent, grounded people.

In January, Journalist Mary Abbajay wrote about mentors and mentees in *Forbes* magazine. In essence, she provided job descriptions for the two roles.

Mentors need a heart to help others. Watching people grow is the only reward they need. Mentors don't need to be perfect. In fact, sharing the experience of failure is just as important as sharing stories of success. Mentors need to be good interviewers. They must listen well and ask meaningful and pointed questions. Mostly, they need to be dedicated to their relationship with the mentee.

Lest you think that those benefitting from mentoring are just there to soak up the dusty knowledge of their colleagues, mentees have responsibilities as well.

Don't ask to be mentored if you aren't committed to growth. A mentor needs to know your goals and desires, so you'd best be able to articulate them.

Sometimes, you'll get chewed out. Learn to filter feedback from emotion and adapt and change accordingly. Don't just talk the talk, walk it. It does you no good to say you'll do something if you won't do it. Be as committed to the mentoring relationship as your mentor is to you.

Throughout my career in nonprofit management and ordained ministry, I've had many people who have mentored and coached me. Some are colleagues, like my former boss and my best friends. Some were therapists. Let's be honest, several were therapists. I've also had the opportunity to be a mentor to new deacons and priests as they began their ministries. That is an honor and privilege that continues to this day.

Until this week, I had never really thought about having a mentoring relationship with Jesus. He certainly fits the job description of a mentor. But, do I fit the description of a mentee. I want to say "yes." Yet, I realize that my commitment is much less than I'd like it to be most of the time. If I want a relationship with Jesus that will make a difference in my life, am I willing to meet the mentee job description?

How about you?

When Jesus asks: “Are you committed to expanding your capabilities as my disciple?” Can you say “yes”? Are you clear about what you want from our Christian lives? Are you willing to ask for help? Show vulnerability? Explore different paths and perspectives? Most of all, are you willing to spend time with Jesus?

These summer Sundays are called “Ordinary Time,” but some folks like to call it “Growing Time”. While our lives move in a different pace during this season, it’s a great time to renew our relationship with Jesus in prayer and reading and conversation with others.

How might Jesus be your mentor as well as your teacher, Lord, and Savior?