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6 Pentecost, Year A
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Giving Up and Giving In

About fifteen years ago I was with my dad driving down to Nashville for Thanksgiving. As we made our way down I-57 it was about supper time so we found a barbecue restaurant not too far from the highway. After we ate, someone asked him if he would like a loyalty cards where you get a hole punch after each visit to this particular place and then eventually get a reward. And without missing a beat, my dad's response was "No thanks. I don't want that weighing me down." Maybe that sounds familiar. I try to share it whenever I get the chance because it speaks to me at a spiritual level. I remember on another road trip between here and Saskatchewan, we had picked up some boxes of books that Ole wanted to move into our place. At first they seemed like they were heavy as we carried them out and fit them neatly into the trunk of our car. When we looked at the trunk it seemed fine and able to hold the extra weight. As we made our way through the hours and the miles we began to forget how much was back there.

We only fully noticed the effect of those boxes again once we got home and unloaded all of them and hauled them upstairs. It was then on our next drive that it dawned on us how much lighter the ride was now. It was almost like we had a new car.

We know this feeling all too well. Sometimes the burdens multiply out of nowhere. They show up and move right in. Make themselves a part of our lives. They slide into the pocket of our hearts whether we invited them there or not.

We are weary and we place burdens upon ourselves and our neighbors. Far from feeling light and at ease, often there is a heaviness that hovers over us. All the while, like Saint Paul, we are captive to our desires that push and pull against the life that comes from God. We want to live turned toward others, free to love without counting the cost but still we are curved inward. Left on our own we are stuck. Simply running in place. Each of us is a collection of paradoxes and contradictions. We are well acquainted with this constant wrestling within and without.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells within me. It is Saint Paul at maybe his most honest and his most relatable. It's a lot to carry. As a nation we have lived what Saint Paul speaks of. Since our founding; life, liberty, and equality have been etched into our creed while at the same time whole groups of people have been denied those promises. The struggle continues still as the gap between our aspirations and our shared reality persists.

We have placed heavy burdens on the very people who have journeyed here searching for new life and on those who already live in the shadows. We join/connect/attach ourselves and one another to yokes that end up being just another card or box to weigh us down as we stumble forward. We hitch ourselves to a thousand things we know will not lead us to rest or freedom. Work, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, perfectionism, living for the approval of others at every turn. In the end it all ends up being like trying to walk around in clothes and shoes that don't fit and really belong to someone else.

In this and every moment we see Jesus and hear him call our name. The friend of tax collectors and sinners. The companion of the exhausted, burned out, discouraged, the weighed down, the passed over, the ones who have tried and failed. He invites us, with each new day, to find our place in his embrace and experience the only rest that will satisfy in the end. Here instead of pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps we fall into grace and there you will never be lost or forgotten. Here we tell the truth about ourselves and our weaknesses. Admit we need a break. Give up the game. Put down the mask. No competing for space in this expansive geography. It all belongs today. Even, especially, your paradoxes and contradictions.

In the waters of baptism you have been joined/connected/attached to Jesus. Flesh and blood. Death and resurrection. His breath is your breath. His death is your death. His life is your life. In this spacious dwelling we can let go of whatever is stealing our rest as a rebellion/protest against every system that robs us of our dignity and drains us of our humanity and commodifies our time down to the second and sells it for profit. Holy communion. Taking Jesus, invitation to let go of whatever else we cling to. Empty handed. Receive Jesus Christ, so in taking hold of him we can let go of whatever else we are clinging to. Happy exchange. You are of infinite value before you ever do anything. You are a child of God from start to finish. Your worth and value come from God and God is well pleased with you. God delights in you. Not your work, or your bank account, or, or, or, you. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. Like going from only hand-me-downs to getting a tailor made wardrobe. There is no bookkeeping or scorekeeping, no death-dealing demands. The pressures off. Find your place in the living God. Stretch out and give in to its new rhythms.

There is a book titled "Saying No to Say Yes." When we learn to say no we actually create new space for God to work and what you are called to do. Saying no to say yes is like those renunciations that we do whenever we remember our baptisms. We renounce those things (as many times as we need) that rob us of life so we can say yes to resurrection wherever it shows up and encounters us. Don't be afraid. Live with courage. Speak the words that God has placed in you and breathe out your own words as God's own breathe living and moving in you.

Sink into your belovedness. Then, speak with authority, conviction, and a smile-- triune God etched upon you forever: In Jesus name: "no thanks, I don't want that weighing me down."