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## *The Same Furrow*

**A homily for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9)  
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell  
at All Saints by-the-Sea in Southport, Maine**

Yesterday, while we were standing in front of the library watching the greatest Fourth of July parade ever, our country turned two hundred and fifty years old. As if to prepare for the celebration, people kept asking a question: How do we make it to three hundred?

Jesus has been asking a version of that question all along. Not about nations, but about communities. How do people remain together without becoming strangers? How do they endure without hardening into camps that no longer recognize one another?

His answer is surprisingly simple.

“Come to me.”

Everything else grows from that.

Our gospel begins with Jesus looking out over the crowd and sounding almost bewildered. “You are like children sitting in the marketplace,” he says. “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.”

Nothing satisfies them. John comes fasting and they call him possessed. Jesus comes eating and drinking and they call him a glutton. It isn’t that one approach failed and another succeeded. They had already decided, before the music even began, that they would not be moved.

I know what that marketplace looks like now.

It looks like thousands of separate screens, each quietly assuring us that the people on the other side are beyond understanding. The more certain we become, the less curious we are. We remain in the same marketplace, but somehow we stop hearing the same music.

Yet every so often something interrupts that pattern.

This spring New York erupted when the Knicks finally won a championship series after decades of disappointment. Strangers spilled into the streets. Every borough seemed to sing with one voice. Someone improvised a chant that somehow held together Muslims, Jews, Christians, fashion labels, basketball, and pure New York absurdity. The city laughed at itself together.

The remarkable thing wasn’t the basketball.

It was the remembering.

For a few hours people stopped performing themselves and simply belonged to the same place. They weren’t documenting the moment. They were inhabiting it.

It reminded me that human beings still know how to gather. We have not forgotten entirely.

On its best days, that is also what the Church remembers.

Look around this room.

Some of us come from Maine. Others have traveled from New York, South Carolina, Colorado, Florida, and places beyond. We do not all vote alike. We do not all read the same newspapers. We almost certainly do not imagine the country's future in exactly the same way.

Yet here we are.

Not because we finally agreed.

Because Christ called us here.

That is one of the quiet miracles of the Church. It gathers people who would never have organized themselves into the same room. It puts the same hymnal into our hands. It teaches us the same prayers. It turns all of our faces toward the same altar.

Not first toward ourselves.

Not even first toward one another.

Toward Christ.

That matters because the unity we receive here is not something we manufacture. We do not become one body because we have mastered the art of agreement or perfected the virtue of tolerance. We become one body because Christ gives us his own Body. Holy Communion is not simply a symbol of unity we have achieved. It is the gift that creates a unity we could never create for ourselves.

There is an old truth about hearts under pressure.

They can break apart.

Or they can break open.

When hearts break apart, we throw the sharp pieces at one another. We know what that looks like. We see it often enough.

But hearts can also break open. They become larger than they were before, making room for another person's grief, another person's joy, another person's story.

That is what Christian worship is quietly training us to become.

Week after week we kneel beside people we did not choose. We confess sins aloud among people who could use them against us and do not. We sing words we did not write. We take bread we did not bake. We practice forgiveness before we feel entirely ready for it.

These are not religious accessories.

They are habits by which Christ slowly enlarges the heart.

Then Jesus changes the conversation completely.

He stops arguing.

He begins praying.

"I thank you, Father," he says, "because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants."

The kingdom belongs to people whose hands are still open.

And then comes the invitation:

"Come to me, all you that are weary and 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."

A yoke was built for two.

In the fields, a younger ox was often paired beside an older one who already knew the work. The older animal set the pace. It carried more than its share of the weight while the younger one learned simply by walking alongside.

That is the image Jesus gives us.

His yoke is not first a yoke to each other.

It is a yoke to him.

He knows the furrow.

He carries more than we can see.

He asks us simply to remain beside him and learn his pace.

And here is the beautiful surprise.

Everyone yoked to Christ eventually finds themselves walking the same furrow.

There is no private yoke.

If I am walking beside him, sooner or later I discover that you are too. The community is not something we invent. It is what happens when many people keep the same step with the same Lord.

Perhaps that is as good an answer as I know to the question people have been asking this week.

Will our nation endure?

I hope so.

Will this little church continue to gather people beneath these rafters another fifty years from now?

I pray so.

But those futures finally rest in hands larger than ours.

In a few moments we will come to this table.

Come not as isolated people trying to hold the world together by your own strength.

Come as people already held.

Come yoked to Christ.

Receive the bread that makes us one Body.

And then go back into the world walking his pace, in the same furrow, with the people he has given you.

Christ has carried his people through kingdoms greater than ours and centuries harder than these.

He knows the way.

Stay close to him.

Amen.