

Missing the point (Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30)

Sometimes we walk into a situation open only to our own expectations and judgments.

by [Kathryn Z. Johnston](#)

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Just when you thought preaching the lectionary in the middle of the summer couldn't be any more of a grind, here comes the RCL with what feels like a random needle drop in the middle of the Gospel of Matthew's album. Or worse, like a B-side by a cover band playing Luke's greatest hits (Luke 7:18ff).

Jesus is mid-ministry, teaching and proclaiming his message in their cities (11:1), when he is approached by the disciples of John the Baptist. JBap is in jail and appears to be reaching out to confirm that Jesus is "the one who is to come." Jesus shares his bona fides with the disciples, who then leave, and then Jesus addresses the crowd. He seems to admonish them for going out to the wilderness to witness the spectacle of John, but not absorbing the message of John.

Jesus makes the claim that John the Baptist is Elijah (11:14) and *then* the assigned passage begins with, "But to what will I compare this generation?"

I guess it is good to know that frustrations with a different generation than one's own are nothing new.

If you preach this text on the assigned Sunday this year, July 5, you might feel a bit like Jesus: frustrated that those who do come to church that day will only walk away satisfied if a sufficiently patriotic hymn is sung. When we walk into a situation open only to our own expectations and judgments, we can miss the point.

Jesus lays out the hypocrisy of finding fault with John because he fasts from food and drink but then also finding fault with Jesus because he *does* drink and eat, albeit with sinners. When we focus on the superficial, we can miss the deeper point.

There's a grassroots nonprofit that recently began its ministry in our area. Us institutional types were more than a little dubious, wary of this upstart with a cool logo that is working out of a store front. They don't run things in conventional ways, and as it turns out, that gives them the flexibility to meet people where they are rather than where grant guidelines that rely on statistics and poverty lines demand people to be.

For instance, this ministry was able to help people whose SNAP benefits were cut or who were worried about being picked up by ICE a lot quicker than the larger, more institutional food banks were. This more nimble nonprofit continues to be incredibly effective, despite the judgment from those on the outside more concerned about how it looks than grateful that they are doing something.

And isn't that just exactly the point, as this passage concludes with, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." What an invitation to us all. Can we allow ourselves to do it? Do we trust Jesus enough to hand over our heavy burdens? You're reading a CENTURY newsletter in the summer, so you might be exactly the kind of person who needs permission to let God be in charge of it all—to not have to do it all yourself, to not have to have it all figured out.

But the next two verses take this encouragement to a deeper place. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." There is much to be gained from wisdom. (Again, you're reading this in the summer, so you might be exactly the kind of person who knows this already.) The more we know about the law of God, the more exact our own moral framework becomes, the more we don't have to fret over decisions. The test for action or inaction becomes simple: Does this show love of God? Does this show love of neighbor?