Grace and peace from God our Father and savior Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In today’s narrative Jesus was displeased with the attitude of the people of his time. After all, whatever John the Baptist said or did or he said or did they do the opposite thing. They were nor driven by a demon nor were they drunkards - they came from God. What was their motive a good detective might ask? You wouldn’t need to be Sherlock Holmes and use a magnifying glass to realize it was because Jesus challenged the life they had known, Asking for change brings about insecurity and makes people uncomfortable. Even today asking people to focus on others and not be self-centered can cause mis-comfort. That is why it is difficult for many on our society to belong to a church because the core values are not the same as our society. It is not ‘those who have the most toys win” or “Every person for themselves.” Nor the golden rule, “those who have the most gold rule.” There is great adoration for those who accumulate the almighty dollar - wealthy politicians, sports figures, entertainers, billionaires and so on. The focus is not on what they have done for others bur rather their wealth.

When Jesus prayed he prayed for the wise - those who are arrogant and stubborn in their own knowledge who God has hidden knowledge from but also the little children ,those who humble themselves and recognize God and can recognize God’s Word. People try to figure everything out and are wise in their own eyes but they miss out because the reality is only God has the answers. We do not have the ability to totally understand God.

We are not in this alone. A yoke is a large wooden harness hat fits over he shoulders of oxen, and this heavy yolk is attached to a piece of equipment that is to be pulled. You have heard the expression strong like an ox/ Together they can pull heavy items. When Jesus talks about the yolk he recognizes that we can have heavy burdens like sin, excessive demands of religious leaders, being oppressed or persecuted and finally becoming weary in our search for God. The familiar words from Jesus: “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. In ancient times, the yoke was a term that was used to describe submission. So, when someone was described as being yoked to someone or something, it means they were in submission to that person. So, to be yoked to Jesus they understood it meant they we serve and obey Jesus. When we yoke with Jesus we humble ourselves and are freed for all of these worries. Then we have a relationship with God that changes out lives from being meaningless, or worrisome toil into being productive and having a purpose.

Yokes are still employed in our world and they are still a burden and a way of harnessing animal’s hard work, especially in places where people don’t have access to the powered equipment. The first ancient readers of Matthew viewed a yoke as a symbol of obedience to God’s law and wisdom. Generally, our human nature is to resist yokes and laws, or not to immediately connect them with the idea of freedom. Through the image of the yoke, however, Jesus invites us to think of God’s law and wisdom as a means to surrender, give way, and accept something graceful and positive—rest, ease, lightness. Jesus links humility to freedom. When we follow Jesus we no longer need to be held captive to sin but can experience the freedom belief in Christ gives us. We can humbly use that freedom to help others, like we do in the food pantry. Set yourself free and follow Jesus and do for others. Amen.