

Romans 7:15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.

17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self,

23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:16 "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

17 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon';

19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;

26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

29 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.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Sermon: Easy Button

Loving Creator, shine as a light before me that you may be seen and not I. Give me words that I may speak, give us ears that we may hear, and through your Holy Spirit help us understand. Amen.

I hope you all enjoyed your holiday celebration for the 4th of July. It is a day when people gather for picnics, cookouts, and other festivities. We have our wonderful parade here through the middle of Monson; we have Summer Fest with all the booths and food; it has become a tradition at our house to watch the Boston Pops particularly because my late grandmother loved to the Boston pops –I think she had a crush on Keith Lockhart.

Much of the celebration on 4th of July seems to be about people partying and having fun rather than a deep reflection of what happened over 200 years ago in the founding of our nation. Yes, there are flags and other reminders that it is a patriotic holiday, but mostly it has become a three day weekend, the time to let loose and have fun.

The Continental Congress had gathered in Philadelphia to decide what to do about the tyranny of a monarchy bent on world domination. The problem was that gov't that was not responsible to end for the people governed The Declaration of Independence laid a foundation upon which the new nation was born.

None of this was easy; there were great arguments concerning the hows and whys and wherefores, and the Continental Congress worked long and hard before deciding that a new nation needed to be formed.

What followed was also not easy. What followed was a long war, nearly lost many times, as the colonists faced one of the most powerful nations on earth.

After the war of independence was won, a nation still needed to be formed, and our constitution was written.

According to a tale recorded by James McHenry of Maryland, an anxious lady named Mrs. Powell accosted Benjamin Franklin outside of independence hall in Philadelphia as the continental Congress had finally crafted the Constitution of the United States and asked him, “what type of government have you delegates given to us?” to which Franklin responded, “a Republic, Madame if you can keep it.”

This has not been easy.

We would like things to be easy. We would like to have the fun of carefree days. We would like to enjoy the benefits of unbridled prosperity. We would like to live in a nation that practices what it preaches. We would like to live in a nation where the laws are equitable for all, and justice is first and foremost a priority. We would like to be able to say that our nation understands that torture is torture, and that war must only be a last resort to solve our problems. We would like to see each generation having more opportunities and a better life. But this is not easy.

It does require work, and effort, and commitment to our principles for us to hold onto the things that are truly important.

Perhaps one of the most difficult things that God gave us to do was to live this life. Living life is not easy, but that is something that we were never promised.

Oh, wait a minute, isn't that what Jesus said? "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

He said my yoke is easy. So this should all be easy right?

Life should not be so difficult. It should be easy.

I have mentioned in recent weeks that it is clear that things are not all that easy around us. Gas prices, inflation, societal choices, and all kinds of other things make this a very challenging time in which to live.

Here at the church we're facing many of these difficulties in our life together. How do we pay the bills? How do we fund our programs? If Jesus' yoke is so easy, why is all of this so hard?

Well, I have taken the bull by the horns and I've taken steps to make things easier for us here at First Church. I went to Staples, and I got an easy button.

Many of you have probably seen the commercials –many of them quite funny –with the easy button. If you need something all you need to do is press the easy button.

"that was easy."

This may be what we need around here; we need something that'll help us make our life easy. Maybe this is what Jesus wanted us to have: an easy button. Now, when we have a difficult decision to make, we can just press the easy button.

"That was easy."

When we realize that we have no more money in the budget to heat the church between now and New Year's, we can just press the easy button.

"That was easy."

When we're struggling with a difficult question: "that was easy."

Right now we're going to have to find a new coordinator of programs and education: "that was easy."

You get the picture.

If this works, we could send one to all the churches in the western area of the Massachusetts conference of the United Church of Christ. We could send one to Jim Antal our minister and president in Framingham. We could send one to John Thomas the minister and president of our denomination in Cleveland, Ohio. We could then be the greatest denomination ever!

And if that works, we could send one to George Bush, and one to John McCain, and one to Barack Obama, and the United States could be everything we want it to be. Maybe that would help!

It would be nice if things were easy here in the church and in the world in general, but unfortunately I think Paul was not only speaking for himself but for all of us when he said, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

This life is not easy; we do face many challenges. We do not always know what to do, and, even when we try our best, we seem to make a mess of things at times.

Within our faith, we have a difficult time knowing just what to think, and this has been the case since the early days of the church, even during Jesus' time.

In our gospel reading today we hear the kind of difficulty that Jesus faced as he carried his yoke. He said:

John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"

No matter which way things were done, people found room to criticize. John was criticized for neither eating nor drinking, and Jesus was criticized for eating and drinking. When faced with this kind of scrutiny who could ever hope to satisfy the people?

I've seen this within the church right here, it almost doesn't matter what decision is made within the life of this church there are those who would disagree. That's exactly why I got the easy button. "That was easy."

I think we see much of the same kind of thing in our political debate today. I can't turn on the news without hearing arguments about our political candidates. We also see it within our towns and schools and wherever people gather together.

And yet Jesus says, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

It is good to point out that Jesus does not say life is easy, he says my yoke is easy.

What is Jesus' yoke? What is the yoke for that matter? The yoke is the thing worn by oxen so they might pull their load. A yoke is a device for bearing a burden. And what is the burden Jesus bears?

Jesus describes his burden throughout the Gospels as doing the Father's will. Doing what God wants, that is the burden Jesus bears. And that is the same burden we are given by Jesus. We are to do God's will.

This is the burden that is easy. Not because everything will go well. We know where following God's will lead Jesus, it led to the cross and the crucifixion, but we also know that it led to an empty tomb and to a victory beyond our comprehension.

Picking up our yoke and following Jesus may not be easy in the sense that life will be easy or that we will always have all we want and be happy. Picking up the yoke of Jesus, picking up our own cross, may actually be a challenge, but, if we are in fact following God's will, we will also share in the joy of the empty tomb and of our own resurrection.

The choices made by the Continental Congress as they brought forth a new nation were not easy ones. The choices we have today as a nation are not easy ones. The choices we have to make within the church are not easy ones. But if we can seek God's will, follow God's ways, pick up our own cross and follow Jesus, then we can say:

"that was easy."

If we are following God's will, we probably don't really need an easy button. What we do need are the words of the gospel, the very good news given to us by Jesus Christ. And what does he say to us?

"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."

It may not be easy from our perspective, but these are perhaps some of the most beautiful words we may ever hear.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.