

Sunday: Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: July 5, 2020

Text: Matthew 11:25-30

Title: Rest

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

The Gospel reading for today contains one of those very familiar verses. Jesus says, “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” As those words sink in, our shoulders relax a little, our mind calms, and we let out a little sigh. We recognize that this is what we need. We need relief from the load we are carrying. We need a rest from the assaults we endure every day. As I hear this verse visions of people stoop shouldered comes to mind. People trudging along weighed down by the struggles they carry with them. Burdened by the weight of the world. Doing what they can to not stumble and fall. Trying to keep it all going but moving slower and slower as time marches on.

Everything we do seems to add to the load we carry. We’ve been working hard at our jobs, putting in long hours, and still struggling to get ahead. We’ve been working at being a loving spouse, providing for our families, being the best mom or dad we can, and yet, every day seems we’re buried deeper in a pile of regrets: “I should have been home more.” “I could have spent more time with the family.: Why does such a little thing cause me to lose my temper?” “When will I ever figure this out?” Even our kids know what it means to work, competing with their siblings or classmates to earn the approval of teachers or Mom and Dad. They think they need to earn that approval so their parents will be proud and love them. “Come to me,” Jesus says, “all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” We say “Great!” for we have been working hard and are in need of rest.

## I.

Our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created us from the dust of the ground. He knows our abilities and our limits. He watches over us and cares for us each and every day. He sees our struggles. This leads us to ask, “What sort of rest does Jesus give?”

Well, what sort of rest do we need? Is it the rest we get with a day off from work to swim, eat barbeque, and enjoy beautiful fireworks? Is it the sort of rest that comes with a family summer vacation? A week spent at the beach or taking in the sights of Mount Rainier? Maybe it's the sort of rest that comes with sleeping in. That is a kind of rest, and I am fairly certain that none of us will complain about an extra day off work. Work wears us out. But is this the sort of rest of which Jesus is speaking? Is this what Jesus promises to give to those who labor and are heavy laden?

The answer, of course is no. He isn't speaking of a rest that is simply taking a break from work. You don't need Jesus in order to have a day off! So, what sort of rest is Jesus promising to give? To answer this question, let's take a closer look at the sort of person to whom Jesus promises to give this rest.

Come to me," Jesus says, "all who labor and are heavy laden." When we hear these words, we easily understand the labor part. Everyone understands the work part of Jesus' invitation. The nature of our lives on earth, even before the fall, involves work. It's what we do as human beings: work the ground, work our jobs, work at school, work for our families, work to take care of the house. Work, work, work. It's what we do all our lives.

Everyone works, to some degree. Everyone labors, as Jesus calls it. But Jesus promises to give rest to those who work and are heavy laden, and he is not just talking about those who are physically or emotionally exhausted because they've been working too hard. No, when Jesus promises to give rest to those who have been working and are heavy laden, he's promising to give rest to those whose work has cause them to be burdened. And not just burdened by a mountain of debt, pile of regret, or failure to achieve all your personal goals. The rest Jesus promises to give, he promises to those whose work has caused them to be burdened in conscience.

## II.

That is what it means to be heavy laden—to know the work that the Law of God demands you to do and at the same time, to know you've been unable to do it. To know what the Law of God demands of you as a husband or wife and to know daily that you have not managed to do the work the Law demands, no matter how hard you have tried. To know what the Law demands of you as a father or mother and to wonder every night, as you put your children to bed, when your failures will catch up with you. To know what the Law demands of you as a child and to desire

to do it, but day after day, you act and speak without thinking, doing what you know you shouldn't, and you wonder when your parents or your teachers will finally have had enough of you. This is what it means to be heavy laden.

To know what the Law of God demands of you, because you know what the Law of God demands. And even more than that, to know that the Law of God is good and wise and is nothing less than the **Will of God**. It's what God demands of you as a spouse, and as a parent, and as a child, and that's why you are heavy laden. It's why you are burdened in your conscience. You know your sin.

This is why Jesus promises to give you rest. You know that your work falls short of the will of God and as a result your conscience is burdened. He promises to give rest to those who know their work is full of sin, whose consciences are plagued by what they have done and by what they have left undone. He promises to give rest to those who know they justly deserve his temporal and eternal punishment. For all who know the Law of God and know they haven't kept it. He promises to give rest to those who work and labor, day after day, but whose consciences are burdened by their sin.

To see an example of this, we only have to turn to Paul, a man called by God to be an Apostle. A man we look to as a model of faith and trust in the mercy and work of Jesus. A man who seemed to have it all together as a Jew and a Pharisee. A man who testifies in Philippians 3:4-6,

<sup>4</sup> If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul the missionary for the Gospel writes in today's Epistle: "I do not understand my own actions," he writes. "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good" (Romans 7:15-16). Paul knew the Law. And Paul knew that the Law is good. Like you, Paul knew that, try as he might, he could not keep the Law.

Paul goes on: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (7:18-19). Clearly, Paul wants to do the Law of God. And clearly, he finds, day after

day, he cannot do it. Like you the evil he doesn't want to do seems to be what he keeps on doing. Until finally, as a man whose conscience is burdened with his sin, he has no choice but to say, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (7:24).

That, you see is the plea of a man who has labored but who is also heavy laden. It's the very sort of person to whom Jesus promises to give rest. Not simply a person who works. Not simply a person who has regret. But a person who knows that he deserves nothing but temporal and eternal punishment because of his work. That, you see, is the person who labors and is heavy laden.

### III.

To such a person Jesus says, "I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you" (Matthew 11:28-29). "Take my work as your work. Take the work I am doing to fulfill my Father's will and have it as the work that you are doing. Take my life as your own. Let it be credited to you so that you might rest and not live in fear. For that is my yoke. The Law is my burden to pay so that you might learn from me that I am gentle and lowly in heart, and so that you might find rest for your souls. Take my yoke, the work I am doing on your behalf, even unto death. And have it as your own. My yoke, given to you, is easy. The burden I bear is light when it's given to you as a gift."

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25). Jesus gives true rest. He gives peace for the consciences that are burdened by sin and live in terror under the weight of the Law. He took all of that. He bore all of that. He died for all of that, so that you might learn from him that what he desires most of all is to give you the gifts he freely earned for you, so that you might rest in him, so that you would have peace in him.

### IV.

What this means is that worship is not about us doing more work to please God. If that's the case, then worship would simply be another work to add to your burdens. Who can pray without being distracted, or sing a hymn with the zeal of an angel? How absurd it is that those whose work is the source of their burdens would think that worship is our chance to do enough work for God!

Worship is not another place for the Law of God with its high demands to heap burdens on you. Worship is the place you come with all the burdens of the week and all the piles of regret and all the sin that plagues your conscience and you meet

Jesus, hear from Jesus, and learn from Jesus, receiving from Jesus the rest he promises to give to you. You who have labored and are heavy laden come, and Jesus gives you rest. It is the Divine Service. It is the place you are able to stop your work and rest while Jesus fulfills his promise.

“Come to me,” Jesus says, “all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” To you who have been working, to you whose consciences are heavy, Jesus keeps his promise. Jesus gives you rest. When the Law shows you your sin, Jesus gives you rest with the Absolution that forgives your sin. When the Law of God shows you that you haven’t lived as you ought, Jesus gives you rest because he united himself to you in Holy Baptism and gives you his life as your own. When you are burdened by sins you continue to battle, Jesus gives you rest in his very body and blood, showing you that he died for those sins. Thus, he gives you strength to live each day as you rest in him.

That, you see, is the rest Jesus promises to give. He promises to give peace to you who know the Law of God and who know you haven’t kept it. He kept the Law in your place, and the rewards he earned by keeping it he wishes for you to have. So even while you work, you always rest in him.

For this precious gift we sing the praises of God our Father as David did in Psalm 103:1-5,

<sup>1</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. <sup>2</sup> Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup> who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup> who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Amen