

Matthew 11:25-30
"True Rest"
Pentecost 6 (Proper 9A)

July 9, 2023
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me? You may not be too familiar with that hymn, but as you sang it, did you notice all those comforting words?

I first came to notice this hymn as I sang it with family and friends on the first birthday of our son Henry. It wasn't supposed to be this way. I expected a birthday cake or cupcakes surrounded by family and friends as we asked Henry to blow out his candle. But here we were singing this hymn at St. Paul Lutheran Cemetery in St. Louis.

One year before, Henry was born as a stillborn. It was a shock. Melissa and I were weary. We each thought, "Could we have done something different?" But now a year had gone by. And time itself does not heal all wounds. It's hard to just move on. Henry was a person and a child of God. We can't forget that. But as I sang this hymn, I was given a lot of hope, and not just the kind of hope that comes and goes, but a hope that is sure and certain.

Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me is based on our Gospel text where Jesus says, "***Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest***" (Matthew 11:28).

Each one of us needs rest for we have been laboring. We work hard at our jobs, putting in long hours, and even when we put in those long hours, we still struggle to get ahead. Utility bills, credit card bills, loan payments all take away from our hard-earned wages. We work hard at being a loving spouse. We work hard at providing for our families. But often the harder we work, the more regret we have. "I wish I could have been home more."

Besides work and money, we face other burdens. As Christians, we face opposition toward the Church. This fallen sinful world has indoctrinated so many people into believing that the Christian Church in its truest form is a place of hate. I say "truest" because so many Christian churches have given up on Jesus and have just joined the world, because they want to be of the world.

As I said last week, Christ's truth often results in a sword. So, by proclaiming any sense of absolute right and absolute wrong results in conflict.

I'll admit, I am comforted that Henry is in the arms of Jesus, but now we have a daughter Elsie and now I am weary for another reason: her future. I see all these changes of this world and most of these changes I don't believe are for the better. I see Satan playing a very prominent role in our culture in what is deemed appropriate. The fallen world has always been against Jesus, but in my short life, this is the worst I have ever seen. I remember those days when going to church was seen as a good thing for society. That wasn't long ago. Today, the Church is ridiculed and attacked, while paganism and every other religion is praised. But despite what I may think, God is still in control. He knows what He is doing.

Many of us face guilt and frustration. We face guilt and frustration in what we have done and what we should have done.

What makes you weary and burdened? What makes you tired?

So, when we hear Jesus say, ***"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,"*** we say, "Thank you!" since we are all in need of rest. We want our hard labor and our burdens wiped away. We all desire rest.

But what sort of rest does Jesus give? Well, what sort of rest do we really need? Is it the rest we get with a day off from work to grill out and enjoy the beautiful fireworks? The kind of day off we enjoy on Independence Day? Maybe it's the sort of rest that comes with sleeping in. That is a kind of rest, which is especially popular on Sunday mornings sad to say, since the fallen world has relabeled Sunday as Sunday Funday. And I'm sure that no one will complain about an extra day off from work. Work wears us out. Work wears us out since we live after the Fall. To Adam God said, ***"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face, you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return"*** (Genesis 3:17-19).

This is why we are tired. Before the Fall, work was enjoyable. After the Fall, work is often unbearable.

But is this the sort of rest that Jesus is speaking? Is He promising to give rest to the working man and working woman?

The answer, of course, is no. Jesus isn't speaking of a rest that is simply a break from work. We really don't need Jesus to give us a day off. So, what sort of rest is He promising to give? To that question, we must take a closer look at the sort of person to whom Jesus promises to give this rest.

Jesus is not promising to give rest to those whose work caused them to be burdened, but Jesus *is* promising rest to those whose work has caused them to be burdened in conscience.

You see, Jesus' words to the crowds here are offering true rest for all who are laboring and heavy burdened because they had not been obedient enough to the demands of God's Law. It was thought that Jews had to earn their way to a saving relationship with God.

God's Law is demanding. The Law demands that you do it. No ifs, ands, or buts. This caused so much of a burden. So, when a Jew failed at being obedient to God's Law, they wearied that God would have nothing to do with them.

To this, Jesus is promising them rest. You know that your work falls short of the will of God, and as a result your conscience is burdened. Jesus promises to give rest to those who know their work is full of sin, and whose consciences are plagued by what they have done and what they have left undone. He promises to give rest to those who know they justly deserve His temporal and eternal punishment. We deserve that, since we have not kept God's Law and we know that we have not kept God's Law. Jesus is not promising rest to those who only work and labor, day after day, but to those whose consciences are burdened by their sin.

This is our real burden. We have fallen short of what God expects from us.

The Apostle Paul gives us a great example of this. He was full of burdens. Paul wrote, ***"I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but do the very things 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. He studied under Gamaliel who was an esteemed teacher of the Law (Acts 22:3). He also studied under Jesus. So, Paul knew that the Law was good, since it is from God. But like you, Paul knew that, try as he might, he could not keep the Law. He wrote, ***“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”*** (Romans 7:18-19).

Paul wants to observe God’s Law. But day after day, he fails. He keeps on doing the things he doesn’t want to do. He is burdened by his sin. He is at conflict with himself. He can only say, ***“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*** (Romans 7:24).

This is a plea from a man who has labored but is also heavy laden. This is the very sort of person whom Jesus promises to give rest. This is not simply a person who works or has regret. This is a person who knows that he deserves nothing but temporal and eternal punishment because of his work. This is a person who labors and is heavy laden.

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 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.”

To this, we say with Paul, ***“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ Our Lord!”*** (Romans 7:25). From this section of Romans 7, we have the doctrine known as “Simul justus et Peccator” or in English, simultaneously just and a sinner. We are sinner-saints when we are heavy laden by God’s Law and seek true rest.

Only Jesus gives true rest. Only Jesus gives peace for the consciences that are burdened by sin and live in terror under the weight of the Law. Only Jesus took all of that. He bore all of that. Only Jesus died for all of that, so that you would have peace in Him.

Here in the Divine Service we receive God's rest. This is the place you come with all the burdens, regret, and sin that plagues our consciences. This is the place where you meet Jesus. You hear His voice in the Scriptures promising you the certain promise of rest. Here, you receive His rest.

Our church services are called the Divine Service for a reason. It's because God is here to serve you – and not the other way around. This is the place where you are able to stop your work and rest while Jesus fulfills His promise.

Jesus says, *“Come to Me ... and I will give you rest.”* When the Law shows your sin, which it always does, Jesus gives you rest with the Absolution that forgives your sin. When the Law shows you that you haven't lived as you ought, Jesus reminds you that you are united to Him through Holy Baptism, which gives you His life as your own. As we are constantly burdened by sins, Jesus gives you rest in His very Body and His very Blood under the bread and the wine showing you that He died for those sins. He says, *“Rest in Me.”*

Jesus 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, so trust in Him, repent and follow Him, for in Him, you have rest. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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