

2014_07_06 Pentecost 4
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Rest in Jesus
Matthew 11:25-30
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²⁵ At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

²⁶ Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. ²⁷ All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. ²⁸ Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Grace to you and peace from Him who is our eternal rest. Amen.

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow children of God,

Think about a time in the last week where you've sat down to really rest. Now think about a time in the last week you've sat down to rest for more than an hour. Now think about the a time in the last week you've sat down for more than an hour without a TV or computer or mobile device or kindle. Now if you're like me, you're probably having trouble thinking of a time in the last week when this is true. When do we would spend more than an hour doing something other than working, sleeping, eating, playing, chasing kids, watching TV, or doing something on involving the internet?

The last time was probably last Sunday. Because here we gather to do what we otherwise would not be doing – we are keeping the third commandment. Here we are again – remembering the Sabbath day (Sabbath = rest), setting it apart as a day of rest, separate from all other happenings in our life. We are here, doing that one thing that is so different than those things we are used to doing. We are sitting, we are listening, we are resting. We are calling this day holy. In an explanation to the 3rd commandment, Luther explains it this way:

"To offer a Christian interpretation of what God requires in [the third] commandment, we point out that we keep holy days not for the sake of

intelligent and well informed Christians, for we have no need of them. We keep them, first, for the sake of bodily need. Nature teaches and demands that the common people – man-servants and maid-servants who have attended to their work and trades the whole week long – should retire for a day to rest and be refreshed. Secondly and most especially, we keep holy days so that people may have time and opportunity, which otherwise would not be available, to participate in public worship, that is, that they may assemble to hear and discuss God's Word and then praise God with song and prayer."

As with everyday in which we hear the Word of God and ponder the work of Christ Jesus our Savior, today we rest. It takes time, it takes patience. But it is time well spent. It is a precious gift, even worth spending an eternity upon.

We need rest, and not just for our bodies. There are things for which we labor and burdens which we carry which impact us more than just physically. No matter how we might busy ourselves, we cannot escape it. We cannot escape the reality of sin – guilt looms over our life; we cannot escape the labor of the law – God's expectations are more than we can bear.

But in such a time as this, He answers and says. "Come to Me, and you will find rest for your souls." And so we sit, we listen, we rest in Jesus. We treasure the third commandment: "Remember the day of rest to keep it holy." Today we will consider three ways in which we rest in Jesus. Firstly, we rest from the burden of personal sin and guilt. Secondly, we rest from laboring under the law. Oh Holy Spirit, grant us rest for our souls. Amen.

Rest from the burden of personal sin and guilt

He labors within. It is like an itch that needs to be scratched. And the more he thinks about it, the more he is compelled to scratch it. The more he thinks he can overcome it, the weaker he becomes. The more he considers it, the more it takes him captive. The good that he wants to do, he does not do, and the evil that he does not want to do, that he practices. It has damaged relationships; it has corrupted his witness; it has wounded his faith; and he wonders if he can be forgiven – again. He knows how wrong it is, and he hates it. What can he say? What can he do? And so he cries out: O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?

It is the struggle of a Christian; it is the struggle of an Apostle. The burden of sin and guilt pour out of his pen as the Apostle Paul writes these words in Romans 7. He pens

these words and reveals the paradox of what it means to be both a sinner and a saint. He writes:

For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:22–24)

Who will deliver us from this body of sin? We are burdened by sin and guilt. We can't say what each Christian's individual struggles are any more than we can know what Paul's were – addiction, lust, pride, anger, coveting, jealousy, propensity to gossip, disrespect of authority, distrust, anxiety, discontentment. What I do know is me. What I do know is what is in me; that in my flesh nothing good dwells. I know what I should be doing, thinking, setting my heart upon, but I don't do it. What I do know is that I hate it. I agree then that the law is good and that my sins are evil; it is then no longer I that do it, but the sin that dwells in me – O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

At such a time, Jesus answers and says, *28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

He speaks to you and He says, "Come. From every burden of sin and guilt, I say, come to Me. From every sinful stain that plagues you, I say, come to Me. From the guilt of past sins, come to Me. There are no sin which is too great. For I have labored for you. I have carried the cross filled with your sins. I have carried the burden of hell itself for you, and by My stripes you are healed. Where your sins abound, I give grace even more. Come to Me, hear my Word, keep the Sabbath. Your sins are forgiven. Rest in me."

Rest in Jesus from sin and guilt.

Rest from laboring under the law

Its been weeks since he's really had a day off. Even when he's home, he's not totally home. By the time he's done unpacking from a business trip, he's getting ready to leave on another. And when he's home, part of him is still at work – checking email, writing a report, thinking about what didn't get done, what needs to get done next week. Even when he is home, its as if he's not home at all.

We sometimes have a tendency to set expectations that far exceed our capabilities. Such a life loses sight of today. We complain about what didn't get done yesterday, or worrying about what needs to get done tomorrow. And then we wonder where the day went.

Other times we have a tendency to set expectations for ourselves that ignore the needs of those around us. We have a vision of what we want to be doing and we miss out on what we really should be doing. We get wrapped up in what we need to do for ourselves that we lose sight of what God needs us to do for others. And then we begin noticing all these other people who are interfering with my goals. Why aren't doing their part? Why aren't they helping me with my part?

In many ways, this is our experience under the law. It is a labor for something that we will never achieve. The expectations far exceed our capabilities. And the more we become focused on working toward what our life should be, the more self-centered we become. We grumble about what didn't get done yesterday and we worry about what needs to get done tomorrow.

Some people think that to be spiritually minded means finding a higher calling. You need to dedicate more time to church; to achieve some greater spiritual work; to spend more time in prayer; to give more money to church; to find a better diet; to exercise more; to keep your life organized and clean. Then you begin hearing sermons that speak about 10 steps toward a better or 5 methods for more or you hear a Joel Osteen speak about how thinking positively will land your a better job.

If we begin to think that the law has anything to do with what I can accomplish for myself, we truly are blind. This is exactly what Jesus accused the scribes and Pharisees of falsely teaching. *And He said, "Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. (Luke 11:46)*

Where did the day go? We've labored for something we will never achieve; we've gotten so wrapped up in what I need to do for myself that we've missed out on what God has come to do for us.

"For the law is spiritual," Paul writes, "but I am of the flesh, sold in bondage to sin." The law is not about what I need to do for myself, it is about what I am called to do for others. And because we are sold under sin, we labor for something we will never achieve: selflessness. That is the spiritual service of the law: to love unceasingly, unconditionally, and without contempt or self-gratification. It is a labor that far exceeds our capabilities.

And this is how we come. We come to Jesus as humbled sinners, broken, burdened, sinful. We come for rest. We come to Jesus – the One whose capabilities we not bound by sin. He is gentle and lowly of heart. His goals never served Himself, but always you. Though He was a King, yet He remained a Servant. So Zechariah prophesied:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations. (Zechariah 9:9–12)

Though He was a King, yet He remained a Servant. He lowered Himself to the true fulfillment of the Law, unceasing, unconditional, and completely selfless love. He is gentle and lowly of heart. And by faith in Him, you rest; you are freed from the expectations of the law. Your King says: “Come to Me you who labor. Take My yoke upon you; learn from Me.”

A yoke is a frame constructed and used to control working animals. Under the law it is a yoke of slavery as Paul writes in Galatians 5:1. Yet in Christ, it is a different sort of yoke. It is a yoke that is carried by freedom, not by coercion; it is a yoke which compels and guides us by the love of Christ. His humility and meekness are what we wear upon our shoulders. It is a yoke carried by Jesus and carried by us only in Him. We enter into Jesus in which the law becomes a delight. For we agree with Paul that the law is good, right, spiritual, and born of God’s will. Our new man rejoices in this.

So now we rest. We set apart this sacred moment – we put down the mobile device, we shut off the television, we set aside the paper work, and we find ourselves at home. It is not yesterday – all things have been forgiven. It is not tomorrow – the lilies of the field do not labor, yet God clothes them. It is today and today God labors for you; today we keep the Sabbath; today we sit, we listen, we rest.

In closing, let us remember: the rest of God always has the last day as its focus. The resurrection of Christ and the new creation are your place of rest. This rest is ours now by faith; and yet still we struggle, still we labor, still we feel burdened as sinner-saint. That is why we remember the Sabbath day. That is why we sanctify this day as a day to hear the word and receive what God has accomplished in Christ. As we gather, we find our rest; as we hear of Jesus, we find our resurrection; as we receive the Lord’s Supper, we taste the new creation. That is why we sanctify every day as a day to ponder the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, that every day might be a holy day, a day of rest. By faith we rest – always hoping, always waiting, always longing for the

final day when we will reach the fullness of God's new creation and find rest not just for our souls, but for our bodies as well.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." (Revelation 14:13)

Rest in Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.