

REST IN JESUS

Matthew 11:25-30

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Series A)

July 5, 2020

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 11, verses 25 through 30. These are gentle and gracious words from our Savior. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Matthew 11, beginning at verse 25, we read in Jesus' name.

²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 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 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."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

After a few weeks of some tough gospel lessons, we get something gentle and easy. Jesus has been teaching us to despair of our lives, this world, and our treasures in this world. He has been teaching us to despair of these things, and now he calls us to come and find our rest in him.

God often works this way. He makes us despair of something we love, or he takes it away from us, so that we might see the better thing that he desires to give to us. And by "better thing," I don't mean that he gives us a better worldly thing, like he takes away our rusty old car in order to give us a shiny new convertible; a shiny new convertible is probably not the better thing God has in store for you. I mean that he takes away the worldly things that grab our attention, so that we might see the heavenly gifts he has stored up for us. God often takes away the things we love, in order to teach us to love better things. He may take away the things of this world so that we might learn to love his kingdom.

And it's not a punishment. It is ultimately for our good. I'll use a worldly example to illustrate this. Suppose your favorite food is chicken nuggets. In fact, you like chicken nuggets so much that you've never even tried any other meat. Why bother? You know you like chicken nuggets, so that's the only meat you ever eat. The only restaurants you go to are ones that serve chicken nuggets. When you go to a friend's house for the Fourth of July, they ask, "Burger or brat?" And you say, "No, I brought my own chicken nuggets." Finally, someone decides to help you out, so he throws away all your chicken nuggets and says, "Here, eat this filet mignon." At first you're really angry that someone would throw away your golden brown chicken nuggets. But they had to do it so that you could experience the better thing. And then you learn that, in comparison, chicken nuggets really aren't that good.

God does something like this with us. The primary way he does this is through his Word. Law and Gospel work this way. The Law teaches us to despair of ourselves. It teaches us to give up on our own righteousness. Paul speaks of this in the epistle lesson from Romans 7. Through

the Law he became aware of sin. He tried to obey the Law, thinking that his obedience would make him righteous, but he just couldn't do it. He couldn't even do the things he wanted to do. Eventually he despaired of himself and says, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:24-25a). He finally found rest in Jesus, but first he needed to despair of his own righteousness.

One of the things we all love is our own righteousness. I like to think that I'm a pretty good person. I'm guessing you do too. We all like to think that. But we're not. And God knows we're not. He knows that we need the righteousness of Jesus Christ instead. But until we learn to despair of our own righteousness, or, really, our *lack* of righteousness, we will continually reject Christ's righteousness. God first needs to make us despair of our righteousness. He needs to take away our pride. We're like the guy who refuses to try filet mignon until the chicken nuggets are taken away. Actually, our righteousness is more like the form chicken nuggets take about twenty-four hours *after* you eat them. That's what our righteousness is like. The Holy Spirit convicts us through the Law so that sin might be seen to be utterly sinful (Rom. 7:13). He makes us despair of ourselves, and then our hearts are prepared to hear and receive the Gospel with joy.

This isn't something that happens to us just once. It sounds like the experience of conversion, and it is. But this continues to be the ongoing experience of Christians for our entire lives. In Romans 7, Paul is not talking about an experience he had at one time in the past. He spoke in the present tense. He was talking about the ongoing reality of his Christian life. As he wrote the letter to the Romans, he was still a wretched man. He still despaired of his lack of righteousness.

This is the difficulty of the Christian life. God's will is that we would despair of ourselves for our entire earthly lives. The purpose of this is so that we might find our righteousness in Jesus and rejoice in him. As soon as we stop despairing of ourselves, we start trusting in ourselves, and when we start trusting in ourselves, we stop trusting in Jesus. And that's bad. The Christian life is one of constant repentance. This is part of the difficulty of the Christian life, but this difficulty leads to the greatest joy.

I tell you this in order to give you hope. God's intention is never to leave you in despair. So when you begin to feel conviction over your sin, don't reject that conviction. Embrace it. Accept it. Because when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, he always comforts our consciences with the good news of Jesus. When we resist the conviction of the Law, we are only cutting ourselves off from forgiveness.

The promise of forgiveness is certain. God promises us, before we even confess our sins, what the outcome will be. It will always be forgiveness. Jesus is always saying, "**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**" (11:28-30). When you begin to feel your righteousness being attacked, that's probably the work of God, and remember that Jesus is always saying, "**Come to me.**"

In this passage, Jesus teaches two basic truths concerning himself. Number one: Jesus teaches us that he is the Son of God. And number two: Jesus teaches us that he is gentle.

Jesus begins this section with a prayer to his Father. It's an exclusive sort of prayer. Yes, Jesus teaches all of his disciples to pray to God as "**Our Father**" (6:9), but there's something different about the way Jesus prays to his Father. For one thing, he reveals hidden things about the Father in his prayer. This wasn't a private prayer where Jesus goes away on a mountain to pray by himself. Sometimes he did that, but here he prays publicly so that all the people around him can hear it. And he speaks of the hidden will of God. Jesus reveals that it was actually the

will of his Father to hide the truth “**from the wise and understanding**” and reveal it “**to little children**” (11:25). This is something that was not obvious about the Father. It’s the sort of thing that Jesus could only know if he has unique, intimate knowledge of the will of God. By praying so boldly, Jesus implies that he is the only Son of God.

And then, after the prayer, Jesus turns to the people and says, “**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**” (11:27). If we didn’t pick up on Jesus’ implication in his prayer to be the Son of God, he makes his claim unavoidable now. He doesn’t call God, “*Our* Father,” in a “we’re-all-God’s-children” sort of way. No, he calls him, “**My Father.**” It’s much more exclusive. And he claims that the Father has handed all things over to him. That’s a pretty bold claim. And he claims there is an intimate and exclusive knowledge between him and the Father. The Father is the only one who knows the Son.

And notice, Jesus doesn’t refer to himself as “*a* son,” but “*the* Son.” And Jesus claims that he is the only one who truly knows the Father. And the only way for anyone else to know the Father, is for Jesus to reveal the Father to them.

This is the first great truth Jesus teaches us in this passage: he is the one true Son of God.

It’s nothing new for us to hear that Jesus is the Son of God. We confess it every Sunday. But this would have been incredibly shocking to people at the time, so it’s important for us to take note of it and remember how shocking it would have been.

It is also important for us to notice it, because it’s fashionable in theological liberalism to say that Jesus never really claimed to be the Son of God. If you have a system where Jesus is just a good moral teacher, kind of like Gandhi or any other religious guru, you don’t really have any need for miracles, or the cross, or the resurrection. And any claim that Jesus is the Son of God just gets in the way, because it makes him the exclusive path to the Father. If Jesus is merely one good religious teacher along with all the other religions of the world, we can’t have him making exclusive claims to be the Son of God. That’s why it’s fashionable in theological liberalism to say that Jesus never claimed to be the Son of God. The problem, of course, is that Jesus *did* claim to be the Son of God, and he did it quite often. This passage is just one example among many.

This is the first great truth Jesus teaches us in this passage: he is the one true Son of God.

The second great truth is that Jesus is “**gentle and lowly in heart.**”

This reveals the nature of God. And it’s not just Jesus, the Son of God, who is gentle with us, but also the Father and the Holy Spirit. There is no conflict between the natures of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are united in their nature and will. So we learn the nature of the Father through the Son. Remember, Jesus says, “**No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**” It is through the teaching and activity of Jesus that we come to know the Father. In John 14 Jesus also says, “**Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**” (John 14:6). The truths of God were hidden from “**the wise and understanding,**” because, in their pride, they rejected Jesus. And if you reject Jesus, then you can know nothing of God, because the only way to know the Father is through Jesus.

Through Jesus we learn the gentleness of God. Jesus says, “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,**” or another way to translate that is, “**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, that I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.**”

REST IN JESUS (Matthew 11:25-30)

Jesus invites all to come to him. And when we come to him we learn that he is gentle. And if Jesus, the Son of God, is gentle, then we also know that our heavenly Father is gentle.

Jesus invites “all who labor and are heavy laden” to come.

There are many things in this life that may burden us. I don't have to list what they all are. You know what they are. And you know which ones are especially heavy in your life. But here Jesus is especially talking about the burden of sin and the condemnation of the Law.

At that time in Israel, the scribes and Pharisees laid heavy burdens on the people. Later in *The Gospel of Matthew*, Jesus says, “The scribes and Pharisees ... tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger” (23:2, 4). By this Jesus was talking about the traditions of men, which the scribes and Pharisees taught as commandments of God (15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13). They were laying extra burdens on the people by requiring them to do things God had not required of them. The Law of God is heavy enough as it is. The soul who tries to obtain righteousness through obedience to the Law will end up weary and heavy laden.

We heard that weariness in Paul as he described his struggle with sin (Rom. 7:14-25). No matter how much he tried, he simply could not master it. So the Law became his master, and the Law can be a harsh master. It is never satisfied by our efforts. That's not because the Law is bad; it's because we are simply incapable of living up to the standard of the Law. So when we seek to find our righteousness and our worth in our obedience, we will only fail. Our labors will be in vain. And the burden will be too much for us.

So it's a wonder, then, that the author of the Law, and the only one who is actually strong enough to bear the burden of the Law, says to us, “Come to me.” In Jesus we find our rest. It is rest from our striving after the Law. You know that feeling when you've tried as hard as you can, which maybe isn't even that hard, but you've still failed? It's the feeling that you have no hope. You've blown it for the ninth, tenth, hundredth, or millionth time, and you come to the resignation that you just can't measure up. In the midst of your failure, Jesus says, “Come to me ... and I will give you rest.”

It's always such a surprise that God himself, the one who gave us the commandments in the first place, is also the one who is gentle with us in our failure. God knows better than anyone how righteous and good the commandments are. And still he is merciful.

He is merciful to us, because Jesus, the only Son of God, bore this burden for us. He took up the yoke of the cross. He carried our sin in his own body. He took the burden that we are unable to bear, and he carried it all the way into death. So when we take up Jesus' yoke, we find it to be incredibly light, because he has already carried the weight of all sin. It does not need to be carried again.

When you come to the one who was crucified for your sins and raised for your justification, he does not lay on you more burdensome commandments. He lays on you mercy, forgiveness, and his own perfect righteousness. Instead of weighing you down, this lifts you up as high as heaven, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. And there you are with him, where you have perfect and eternal rest. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.