

+ 7th Sunday After Pentecost: July 19, 2020 +
St Paul Lutheran, Tomah, Wisconsin
Pastor Korey Van Kampen
"Come to Jesus and he will give you rest"

Matthew 11:25-30 At that time, Jesus continued, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from clever and learned people and have revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, because this was pleasing to you. ²⁷ Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because 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."

I'd like you to think that you're in the market for a job. You look, you apply, and now you're set to interview with the manager. After getting through all the "tell us why we should hire you" questions that often come up in interviews, the manager looks you square in the eye and says, "I've got to tell you. This job isn't necessarily going to make you popular among your family, friends, and neighbors. You're going to work long hours. You're going to be stressed. You're going to be tired. A lot of times, you'll feel like nobody is listening. Oh, and the pay isn't much right now. And I need you to make this job your highest priority." How many of you are going to walk out of that interview and take that job? My guess is not too many of us, right? Who signs up for that kind of job?

But, what if that manager guaranteed something in the future -- something so great that made all the hassle, all the low pay, all the stress, -- everything that you gave up to have that job worth it in the end? If, in some way he could guarantee -- no shenanigans, no lies -- that after 30 years on the job, you'd be the happiest person on earth or something like that, would that change how you look at it? Probably would, right?

Over the past several Sundays, as we've looked at Matthew 10, Jesus has given us some doozies as we look at our call to discipleship and ministry in his name. He's told us that we should expect opposition. He's told us that following him will bring division even in our closest relationships on this earth. Then, in Matthew's account of Jesus' life, we see it happening. John the Baptist is put in prison with little to no chance of release and he even has some moments of doubt. The same people who rejected John for one reason were now rejecting Jesus for the opposite reason. The towns in which Jesus performed many miracles were in large scale rejecting him, so much so that Jesus announced that the people of Sodom would have it better on the last day than they would. Opposition. Rejection. Division. We look at all of it and wonder, "Why would anyone sign up to follow Jesus if this is what happens?" There has to be a bigger reason. And that's what Jesus shows us in our gospel lesson. There we're invited to Come to Jesus... and he will give you rest.

Rest. More and more today people are realizing the importance of rest. Tons of articles have been put forth in magazines and newspapers heralding the importance of down-time -- whether it's a good night's sleep, a weekend away from emails and texts and work, or just a plain old vacation. Rest allows your body and mind to rejuvenate and recover, and it actually allows you to be a more productive and happier person. While rest for the body is good, that's not what Jesus promises to all who come to him. Instead he promises rest for the soul.

Now, to understand what rest for the soul is, we have to first see why we need it, and why an invitation to soul-rest is attractive. In Jesus' day, people generally believed there was only one way to get to God, and that was by following the rules. And there were lots of them. The Pharisees and other religious leaders had elevated many of their traditions so that they were regarded almost the same as commands of God. They felt that if they put a lot of effort into keeping these laws and traditions, they would be found worthy. But the reality is that this was a crushing burden. People lived their whole lives afraid of slipping up -- and if they did, and happened to do it publicly, then the religious leaders were quick to pounce and label them a sinner. As a result of this, many had given up on even trying to be good enough. They were living without hope of ever getting to God and ever being found worthy. They said, "What's the point?"

While our world today is a little different than 2000 years ago, our human condition remains the same. What's changed between then and now is that now, people have many different ideas about what the standard for worthiness is, and who exactly gets to declare people worthy. But we still want to be found worthy. While some still look to God and religion for the standard, many have fixed their attention elsewhere. Make no mistake, every human being is trying to live up to standards. For some it's the standards of their parents -- trying to mirror their hard work, their success, their happiness, their morality, and if I can do that, then I'm worthy. For others it's the standards of their work -- needing to be successful, to be the first one in and the last one out, to achieve promotions and climb the corporate ladder or carry on the family business, and if I can do that, I'm worthy. For still others it's the standard of our looks -- wanted to be found fit and attractive -- or at least fit and attractive for our age. For still others it's a particular person -- this person -- a certain boy or girl, or a friend -- needs to want to be with me and I only feel worthy if they want to be with me. You can find examples of chasing worthiness everywhere -- because we just want to be found worthy.

But you see, there's a problem. None of these things can ever declare us worthy. That's what the people in Jesus' day discovered as they tried to keep all their laws and traditions. And that's what still happens today. As much as I might think I'm living up to my parents' standards and pleasing them, I'm never quite sure of it. As much as I might think I'm fit and attractive enough, all it takes is one ill-placed mole or pimple for that worthiness to be cast into doubt. As much as I might think I'm being successful and doing well at my job or the family business, all it takes is one mistake that I should have caught -- or an economic downturn that I had no control over -- to throw all of that up into the

air. As much as I think I've been good enough to meet the standard, no matter who sets it, I can never be sure of it. It's been said that every human being has a deep internal murmur in their hearts -- a deep inner voice of self-reproach that says, "You're not worthy. You're not good looking enough. You're not kind enough. You're not successful enough. You don't work hard enough." and there's always a part of us that at least wonders if that voice is true, and often at some level knows that it is.

The Bible calls that inner voice a conscience. People naturally spend all kinds of energy trying to either appease their consciences, or, when they've given up on appeasing them, then they seek to silence their consciences -- to quiet every voice from every angle that might tell them that they're not worthy. So we work hard at our worth. We spend all kinds of energy trying to be the perfect parent, the perfect student, the perfect worker, the best looking, and so on. We virtue signal on social media so that the masses know how worthy we are. We cancel everyone and everything that doesn't affirm us in our quest for worthiness. But the voice doesn't go away. The conscience is good that way. You see the conscience knows that there is a standard for being found worthy. It knows that God is the one who is the judge of that worthiness, and it knows that we haven't met the standard - that we sin against God and fall short of his glory.

And so our quest to prove our worthiness is exhausting -- physically, it's exhausting emotionally, and it's exhausting spiritually. And it never ends. That's why we need rest. Rest for the soul is rest from all this work of proving our worth before God and others. That's what Jesus promises when he says "Come to me and I will give you rest." So how can Jesus give that kind of rest? It's a little counter-intuitive, but Jesus says, "**Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.**" At first that might sound just like another burden. A yoke was a piece of wood that helps a person carry heavy things on their shoulders. Think jugs of water, bushels of grain and things like that. Is Jesus just telling us to take up a different load, saying "this time it will work?" No. Read it again, this time put the emphasis on the word "my." Take MY yoke upon you. It's an invitation to trade. That's how he gives us rest.

Jesus took our yoke. On one side of that yoke is the burden of proving our worth in the eyes and sight of a perfect, holy, and righteous God. On the other is the load of our sin, guilt, and shame for all the times we've failed and proven ourselves unworthy. Jesus carried that yoke perfectly. He lived every moment of his life in complete compliance with his heavenly Father. He loved God with all his heart and he loved his neighbor more than himself. His whole life was declared worthy in public on two occasions. And then he took every last ounce of our sin, our shame, and our guilt and he carried it to the cross where he suffered and died for it. And the yoke that Jesus gives us in its place is one where we get the credit for his perfect life, and on which there is no record of our sin.

Rest only comes when a job is finished. When God created the world, why did he rest on the 7th day? Not because he was tired, but because his work was finished. In light of that, I have a small confession to make. I am a 90%'er. What that means is that back when we

owned a home, when there was a project to be done, I'd get it about 90% done -- done enough to live again without much disruption, but it wasn't finished. Are any of you 90%'ers too? I think it's pretty common. But what happens when you're a 90%'er is that you look around your house and it's impossible to rest because all you see is projects that need to be finished. Right? Rest for the soul is the same way. It's only possible if the job is finished. On the cross, Jesus completed his perfect life and he died for our sins and what did he say at the end? It is finished -- and now we can rest. We can rest because we've been declared worthy by the creator and ruler and judge of the universe and all our failings are gone. Come to Jesus and he will give you rest.

So why would anyone sign up to follow Jesus if following him means rejection, hardship, and opposition? It's because Jesus guarantees something much bigger and better than a big paycheck, much bigger and better than earthly happiness, much bigger and better than an easy life. Jesus guarantees rest for your soul. He guarantees all who come to him that they can give up their endless striving, give up their insecurity, give up their attempts to hide their guilt and shame and simply rest. Rest in the complete worthiness Jesus won with his life. Rest in the complete forgiveness that Jesus won with his death, and Rest eternally in the new life that Jesus sealed with his resurrection. Come to Jesus and he will give you rest -- guaranteed. AMEN!