

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 11:25–30

Sermon: “Come and Rest”

“Come to me,” Jesus says, “all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (v 28). And we say, “Great!” because we could use some rest. We’ve been working hard at our jobs, at home and we’re struggling to get ahead and we been struggling with this pandemic. We’ve been working at being a loving spouse, providing for our families, being the best parents we can. We’ve been dealing with the problems in our society. Every day it seems we are buried deeper in a pile of regret and sorrow. We keep trying but we keep failing. And Jesus says, “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” We say, “Great!” for we are in need of rest. But 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 the 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 the Grand Canyon?

Maybe it's the sort of rest that comes with sleeping in. That is a kind of rest, and I'm fairly certain that none of us will complain about an extra day off work, normally. 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. We 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. We understand the work and the stress. Everyone understands the work part of Jesus' invitation. The nature of our lives on earth, even before the fall, involves work. It is 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's 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've been working and are heavy laden, he's promising to give rest to those whose work has caused 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.

That's what it means to be heavy laden to know the work that the Law of God demands us to do and, at the same time, to know we've been unable to do it. To know what the Law of God demands of us as a husband or wife and to know daily that we have not managed to do the work the Law demands, no matter how hard we've tried.

To know what the Law demands of us as a father or mother or grandparent raising grandkids and to wonder every night, as we put them to bed, when our failures catch up to us. To know what the Law demands of us as a child and to desire to do it; but day after day, we act and speak without thinking, doing what we know we shouldn't. We wonder about this new normal with the pandemic and with the unrest all around us. We lie awake wondering what we can do. This is what it means to be heavy laden.

To know what the Law of God demands of us, because we 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 is what God demands of us as a spouse, and as a parent, and as a child, as brothers and sisters in Christ and that's why we are heavy laden. It's why we are burdened in our consciences. We know our sin.

This is why Jesus promises to give us rest. We know that our work and our lives falls short of the will of God, and as a result our consciences are burdened.

He promises to give rest to those who know their work is full of sin, whose consciences are plagued by what they've done and by what they've left undone. He promises to give rest to those who know they justly deserve his temporal and eternal punishment, for they know the Law of God and they 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 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 us, 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 us, 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.

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 we might learn from him that what he desires most of all is to give us the gifts he freely earned for us, so that we might rest in him, so that we would have peace in him.

What this means is that worship our 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 our 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 us. Worship is the place we come with all the burdens of the week and all the piles of regret and all the sin that plagues our conscience and we meet Jesus, hear from Jesus, and learn from Jesus, receiving from Jesus the rest he promises to give to us. We who have labored and are heavy laden come, and Jesus gives us rest. It is Divine Service. It's the place we're able to stop our 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've been working, to you whose consciences are heavy, Jesus keeps his promise. Jesus gives you rest. When the Law shows us our sin, Jesus gives us rest with the Absolution that forgives our sin. When the Law of God shows us that we haven't lived as we ought, Jesus gives us rest because he united himself to us in Holy Baptism and gives us his life as our own.

When we are burdened by sins we continue to battle, Jesus gives us rest in his very body and blood, showing us that he died for those sins. Thus, he gives us strength to live each day as we rest in him.

That is the rest Jesus promises to give. He promises to give peace to all who know the Law of God and who know we haven't kept it. He kept the Law in our place, and the rewards he earned by keeping it he wishes for us to have. So even while we work and struggle, we always rest in him.

Amen