

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 11:25–30

Sermon: “Rest in Christ”

The *Verse* for this day, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”** which comes from our *Gospel* text, sets the theme for the day.

We’ve all had those times when what we’re trying to do becomes a burden and wearisome, for some it’s math, for others it’s things mechanical, it could be golf or bowling, for others it’s understanding people. We try to do something, but we just can’t get it. No matter how hard we try, we can’t succeed. The more we try, the more frustrated we get.

We want to accomplish all by ourselves what we’re doing, but we find we don’t have what’s necessary to get the job done. Our inability becomes a burden, a huge frustration.

Finally, being unable to accomplish our task can wear us down, and we become weary of ever completing it. We despair of our wretchedness.

The way many people falsely understand salvation leads to this same despair. Luther understood this frustration, we've heard the stories of how he never felt right with God and would whip himself. He almost died. He couldn't do enough and neither can we.

Salvation by works of the Law—trying to be saved by what we do is like trying to accomplish something but never attaining it. The Law tells us what we're to do but doesn't enable us to comply with its commands; rather, it causes us to become more unwilling to keep the Law, even increasing sin. Trying to live up to the Law only ends in despair.

The Law doesn't save; it brings knowledge of sin. Trying to attain salvation through the Law only makes us weary and heavy laden with guilt.

Paul speaks of this struggle he had in today's Epistle. He says:

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. . . . 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." (Rom 7:14–15, 18–19)

Paul finally throws up his hands as if in total frustration:

"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24). If we look truthfully at ourselves, our life, like Paul's, is a constant struggle with sin.

We don't do the good we desire. We're are sinners, wretched sinners just like Paul, deserving eternal death in hell. This is what we confess when we say, "I, a poor miserable sinner" in the liturgy.

Most of the time we try to hide this wretchedness from ourself. We try to push this out of our mind, not thinking about it or justifying our actions. We come up with wise and learned schemes to justify ourselves. While we might try to hide the fact that we're a sinner deserving damnation, the burden of our guilt remains. For example, we've done some evil to a friend or family member. We've tried to forget it, tried not to think about it, even tried to explain it away with some rationalization, but the heavy burden of guilt remained.

God the Father does not want you to be weary and suffer the burden of our sin. Therefore, he has revealed to us his gracious will through his Son.

"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth," Jesus prays in our text, "that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 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" (vs 25–27). The Father's will is seen only through his Son, Jesus. All things, including our sins, have been handed over to the Son by the Father. He was sent to reveal his Father's gracious will to you.

Jesus entered Jerusalem the last time humble and riding on a beast of burden to take the burden and weariness of our sin from us to give us his rest. He took our sins to the cross. On the cross, he died for our sins, removing them.

Believers in Christ find true rest for their souls in him who has taken the burden of their sin from their shoulders and put it on his own. Instead of acting wise and understanding, hiding our sin, he calls on us to become little children, admitting our sinfulness like Paul, and to receive his good and gracious gift of forgiveness.

Our Lutheran fathers spoke of this Good News this way: **Christ calls all sinners to Himself and promises them rest. He is eager that all people should come to Him and allow themselves to be helped. He offers them Himself in His Word and wants them to hear it and not to plug their ears or despise the Word. Furthermore, He promises the power and working of the Holy Spirit and divine assistance for perseverance and eternal salvation so that we may remain steadfast in the faith and gain eternal salvation**>. (Formula of

Concord Ep XI 7)

First, Christ came to bear the burden of the Law for us. He fulfilled all that the Law requires in our place. Second, Christ came to bear the burden of our sin for us. That's precisely what he was doing at the end of his life when he entered Jerusalem on that beast of burden, a donkey—taking away our burden of sin. With the crossbeam on his shoulders like a yoke, Christ took our sins on himself on the cross. As Isaiah said, ***“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed”*** (Is 53:4–5).

Today, Jesus calls and promises all who labor and are heavy laden and weary by sin to come to him for rest: ***“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”*** (vs 28–30). Christ calls us to himself and promises each of us rest, forgiveness and the comfort it brings.

His Word and call enable us to come. By our own reason and strength, we cannot believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to him. But today the Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith.

The Holy Spirit does for us the same as what he did for Paul and the whole Christian Church on earth: he keeps us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, he daily and richly forgives all our sins and the sins of all believers.

Today, Christ call us to himself and promises us rest. **“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty”** (Antiphon; Ps 91:1) Living in the shadow of Christ’s cross, we have rest. We have the true rest of not having to carry the burden of our guilt or having to fear its condemnation. Therefore, we are bold to pray as we did in today’s Collect, **“Gracious God, our heavenly Father, Your mercy attends us all our days. Be our strength and support amid the wearisome changes of this world, and at life’s end grant us Your promised rest and the full joys of Your salvation.”**

This rest is yours and mine in Christ, for he calls us to himself and promises us rest. ***“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”***

Amen