

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan
The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 23, 2017
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. Yes, Father, because this was pleasing to you. 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.

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Sleepless nights aren't any fun. You toss and turn while trying everything to relax. You count sheep. You get up to go to the bathroom. You read while drinking warm milk. You take a sleep aid. Nothing you try seems to work. Finally, you give up because it is 5:15. You need to get up at six and what happens? You fall asleep only to wake up completely exhausted 45 minutes later. Sleepless nights are no fun.

Stress sometimes causes us sleepless nights. It might be a problem at work or with a friend. It could be health issues (your own or the issues of someone you love). It might be a baby who doesn't sleep at night or worrying about your child who is away from home. Stress takes its toll and pretty soon it is several nights in a row without sleep. What do you want more than anything in the world after four or five sleepless nights in a row? Rest. Plain and simply you want rest.

Stress can rob us of sleep, but sometimes there is something even more sinister and evil which disrupts our ability to sleep. Sometimes a guilty conscience robs you of sleep. You feel guilty about something you did (or didn't do) or something you said (or didn't say) or something you thought. You might even have apologized for it, but you can't shake your guilt. It keeps eating and gnawing away all the while robbing you of your ability to sleep. Yes, you want rest, both for your body and your guilty conscience.

Jesus comes to you and me today with a message which speaks to our longing for rest. He offers us the gracious invitation, **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** Jesus invites us with these words to come to him with our burdens, lay them down at his feet and find rest for our souls.

Jesus' invitation is gracious and kind, but how often do you actually find yourself taking him up on it? How often do you actually take your burdens, lay them down at his feet and find rest? Or does your pattern look something more like this: you come to Jesus to lay your burdens down but your hands are tightly clenched around your burden and your teeth are gritted when asking for help? Does this sound like you and the burdens you carry?

Deb was a woman who had a hard time letting go of her past mistakes. She'd heard Jesus invitation and knew he wanted her to find rest in his loving forgiveness. She knew his burden was easy and his yoke was light. She knew all of this, but she had a hard time believing it applied to her. She would often encourage other people with Jesus' promise, but she had a hard time applying this truth to her life.

Deb had one particular sin which she could not forgive herself for committing. She had asked for forgiveness countless times, she'd gone to counseling over it and heard the counselor pronounce forgiveness to her, but she couldn't get over what she'd done. What had she done? She had an abortion when she was 16. She was so young and terrified about what might happen to her. What would her parents think? How could she raise a child? Her life would be over and she chose to abort the baby.

Deb carried the weight of this decision for years after she made it. Her heart was filled with regret and shame because her selfishness drove her to take an innocent human's life. She beat herself up over this decision and couldn't get rid of her guilt. Have you ever found yourself in Deb's shoes where you've

done something which you are convinced is so terrible and horrible that God will never forgive you? You might have gone to him again and again, but your burden only seems to get worse?

Maybe it is the fact you got a divorce and it was your fault. Or maybe you had a huge fight with someone who died and you never made amends for it. Perhaps you were overly critical of your children and they no longer talk to you. Or you stole something (got away with it) but now you can't go back to pay it back even though you know what you did is wrong. Or maybe you had an abortion or pressured someone into having an abortion. It could be anything, but you can't give it up and lay it down.

Where do you turn when you think you've done something which you are convinced you cannot be forgiven? **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."** Jesus pleads with you to come to him, let go of your sin and find rest for your troubled and burdened soul.

What kind of rest does he offer? He invites you to come to him with your guilt. He doesn't say you can come to me after you've said x amount of prayers. Or you can only come to me only after you've said you were sorry 35 times. He doesn't say the only way to come to him with your guilt is if you've shed enough tears or sufficiently beaten yourself up. No, the only thing he invites you to do is to come to him with your guilt and he will give you rest for your soul.

How does he provide rest for your soul? Jesus will come and invite you to see what he has done with your guilt. He will first take you to a courtroom where he (the innocent man) is condemned to die by his fellow Jews. Then he will take you to another courtroom where he (still innocent) is condemned to die by the Gentiles. Next he will take you to a cross where he (still an innocent man) is nailed to a cross and there he dies the death he was wrongly convicted of.

However, his tour isn't done. He will then take you to God's courtroom where a different sentence is pronounced. You will hear God thunder at Jesus the verdict, "Guilty!" What is sin is Jesus guilty of committing? He's guilty because God says Jesus caused the divorce. Jesus is guilty because God says he is the one who fought with someone and was overly critical of their children. Jesus is guilty of stealing and the murderous abortion. Not you. What does Jesus have to say to you after this verdict?

"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Jesus says, "I have taken your load of sin and paid for it. You don't need to do anything to pay for it. It is gone. Come to me and find rest for your soul because this is what has happened with the sins you are convinced cannot be forgiven. They are gone."

The best part about this forgiveness? Jesus will continue to remind you and me of what he did for us every time one of those sins creeps back in and starts gnawing on our conscience. He will take us to his cross and show us his love for us and how much he wants us to have rest for our souls each and every single time. There are no exceptions. There is no difference. He will give you rest for your weary and burdened conscience. Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful rest for our souls. Amen.