

Rev. Dan Welch Pent 5 7-5-20 Text- Matthew 11: 25-30

Here in Matthew 11, Jesus promises rest. And that sounds... fantastic! Rest is exactly what we need with the hot and humid weather we've been having and the stressful year we have had so far filled with anxiety about the global pandemic and the ongoing social unrest in our country. Yes, rest, physical and mental, is something I am sure we would all very much welcome for many reasons. On the screen is a nice relaxing scene. A couple of comfortable chairs out on the dock of a beautiful lake on a gorgeous summer day. Rest.

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 (humble) in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

These verses are ones that I sometimes share during visits to members who are in the hospital or at other difficult times. Last Fall though, I remember sharing these words of Jesus with a member during a hospital visit and quietly wishing I could feel them applying to me, too.

I was going through an especially hectic time. Within a two-week period, I was going to officiate at two weddings, two funerals, and a baptism, in addition to preaching on those two Sundays. What is more I had just starting using a brand-new curriculum in my Wednesday confirmation classes which I enjoyed by the way, but that meant extra work each week. Plus, I had also just taken on the exciting, yet challenging duty of teaching the 7th and 8th grade religion class at First Lutheran School. On top of that, I had several hospital visits and funeral home visits to make along with pastoral counseling sessions, and more. How in the world was I going to get everything prepared and accomplished? Then on a personal note, our daughter Samantha had just gotten on a plane headed to Cambodia to serve as a missionary for 9 months. I am not saying all this to try to garner sympathy, please understand, but to share with you how these words from Jesus in our text today from Matthew 11 can sometimes be difficult for us to feel and relate to, at least they were for me back then. For me, during those days, there was no rest. There was just one activity, one duty after another to attend to. There was too much going on and so little time to do it. Too much to do. Too much to deal with. There was no rest. It was hard to sleep to at night.

It probably happens to everyone. It has probably happened to you: A seemingly impossible load, maybe it is during finals week at school and you have projects, papers, and final exams to get done. Or maybe it is at work during a crunch time and a deadline is looming closer and closer. Perhaps it is at harvest time on the farm and all the work has to get done before the weather turns bad. Burdens, worries, and anxieties. Sleepless nights. Whatever the cause may be, you

go through a time when it just seems like there is no rest for you. Maybe it is something else, like anxiousness over a loved-one's on-going health problems and you feel helpless.

At times like these, life sort of reminds me of an hourglass, one of those ancient timepieces, like the one the Wicked Witch had in the Wizard of Oz. Do you remember? Dorothy is locked in a room and the Witch turns the hourglass upside down and the sands began to flow from one end of the hourglass to the other, passing through the narrow center. During that time last Fall, it was like I was caught in the center of an hourglass with all of the sands of pressures, of responsibilities, of things to get done, and worries pushing down on me. Not able to rest.

Can you relate to times like that? Times when your mind continues to race because there is too much to do. Too much happening. And the nights are restless.

In our text there is the promise of rest, but I realize now that when I was praying last October during that especially hectic stretch, that it was not "rest" that I was looking for. What I really wanted was the word found at the *end* of our text: "Easy". "My yoke is *easy*", Jesus says. And that's what I wanted; for God to make things "*easier*" for me. "Make it better Lord, take all this stress away. Make it *easier*."

(SHOW SLIDE ON SCREENS MARKED "EASIER")

You've had a prayer like that, too: "Fix it, Lord. Do something. Make this thing go away. Make it easier."

But easier is not the heart of the promise of Matthew 11, because deep down in the soul we know it can always be harder. No, the promise of Matthew 11 is not found in the word "easy" but Jesus' description of Himself: "For I am gentle, and humble in heart."

In our assigned Old Testament reading today from Zechariah we hear of the Messiah coming lowly, *gentle*, riding on a donkey. Jesus has a lot ahead of Him that week. A lot more than I could ever handle or imagine even in my worst crunch time. Jesus had lots of responsibilities and burdens during holy week, to say the least. It is His responsibility to bear our burden; the burden of all our sins and the death that we deserve. On Good Friday He is going to do just that. But not before a sleepless night on Thursday.

On Maundy Thursday, He is in the garden. He is praying. His disciples may get some rest, but not Jesus. The soldiers come. He is arrested. Sentenced. Mocked. Tortured. And by Friday He is on the cross after having been sleepless. But He is on the cross because He is bearing our burden for us.

(SHOW SLIDE ON SCREENS WITH A CROSS)

All that has gone on and all that is too much for us is on Him on Good Friday on the cross. And if that were not enough, on Sunday morning, He rises from the dead. He is alive! He is present. Because He knows how hard it is for us to respond to His invitation: “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened”... in the middle of the night when your mind is racing and too much is going on. Prayer isn’t always there. And He comes to us. Risen from the dead, He comes to us. Into our souls, into our whole life, to give us rest. That is why “easier” is not enough. *It leaves out the cross*. It leaves out the resurrection. So that is what we need to add. Add a cross to easier and you come up with...

(SHOW SLIDE ON SCREENS WITH THE WORD EASTER)

Easter. Add a cross and Easter is there. That is enough. There is rest for our souls from gentle Jesus.

Now I know, what could have happened during that stressful time last year. Things could have gotten easier or they could have gotten a lot harder. I’m here today, so I obviously survived that abnormally hectic and incredibly challenging time! Everything got done. Most importantly Samantha made it safely to Cambodia and safely back home again after 8 and a half months. Yes, Jesus did end up making it easier for me.

But looking back, what I especially learned from that time is that praying for “easier” is not enough. It’s *Easter*. It’s there that we have rest for our souls because of what Jesus did at the cross and in His rising from the dead. It’s at Easter that Jesus took care of our greatest needs of all. He has earned forgiveness of sins and eternal life for us. It’s at Easter where gentle and humble Jesus comes to us to give us rest. This rest He delivers to you personally today through His Word and Sacraments. Yes, Jesus’ words offer comfort and promised rest, both in this life and in the age to come, and it’s all because of Easter. Amen.