

Rest
14th Sunday after Pentecost
September 6, 2009

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses 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, 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 11:25-30

We're looking today at our Gospel reading from Matthew, so I invite you to open your Bibles to Matthew 11:25-30. Matthew is the first book in the New Testament, so the order goes **Matthew**, Mark, Luke and John. Does anyone know who wrote the book of Matthew? That's right – Levi! Levi is his Hebrew name, Matthew is his Greek name. That's your bit of Bible Trivia for this morning.

Welcome to Rally Month! This is the first Sunday when we begin to return to our Sunday morning schedule we follow from September to May. You've already noticed one change: we're using Setting Two in the Hymnal for the liturgy this morning. Next Sunday we'll have our VBS themed service where we have invited back all those who attended VBS to worship with us and lead us in singing some of their favorite songs from the summer, as well as starting our Sunday School and Adult discussion after church. The following Sunday, the 20th of September, we will have installation of Officers and new members, followed by the "Picnic at the Parsonage" after the Sunday School hour.

In addition to these, September also witnesses the starting of our Women's Bible Study on Monday nights, the Men's Breakfast starting on the 12th, meetings and planning session with our soon-to-be-confirmed students, a funeral planning session (still tentatively planned for the 19th), and a coffee & dessert time with President Keurulainen on the 29th just to mention some of the things going on here at LCC.

And as if that's not enough, outside of church, school has started: college students have moved back to school, sports programs are starting to rev up again, and extra-curricular activities both in and out of school are back in full swing. For some, summer work schedules are over, and the hours have increased as the workplaces get back into the swing of the non-summer months.

AND THEN, there are even more things that each of us individually have in our lives that demand our attention, that I didn't mention.

Whew! Anyone feel tired already? Anyone feel like they could use a rest?

I did a search and the word "rest" or some form of it, occurs 356 times in the Bible. I find that fascinating – the Holy Spirit references for us 'rest' almost the same number of days there are in

a year. Could it be that one of the reasons is we are such a busy people that we need to be told to slow down, to stop, and to just rest in Jesus? Could it be that we need to return to our God and just let Him take care of us, to rest ourselves in Him? This is basically what Jesus was inviting the people to do then, and still invites us to do, today. Just come to Him and rest on Him.

When we look at this passage, there are three parts to this invitation, and you can make a note of these in your Bibles.

The first part is “Come.” Jesus invites us to come to Him and Him alone. Seems rather simple, doesn’t it? And yet in America, according to a report released by the U.S. Department of Labor last July, when you add the numbers up, the average American household spends nearly \$6000 each year on things that are supposed to help them find rest. Some will spend more, some less, but the point is the same: we are a people who are looking for an escape from our day-to-day stresses, and every year we’re spending more and more money on things that don’t last. A perfect example is what happened up here at a Children’s Message last May when I asked the children if they could remember everything they received for Christmas just 5 months previous, and they couldn’t remember it all. We tend to chase after things, but the one ‘thing’ we’re lacking isn’t really a ‘thing’, it’s a person. It’s Jesus, and He holds out His hands to us, and invites us to just come to Him.

Just come. Just come in to His open arms and leave behind all that ‘stuff’; all the things this broken and fallen world offers as its best hope for rest. The invitation is for all – just come. We don’t have to get our lives cleaned up before – just come. The old hymn says, “Just as I am without one plea.” We don’t have to get cleaned up before we take a bath, and we don’t have to get it all together before going to Jesus. Once we’re with Him, He will clean us up, He will change us. “If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation! The old has died and the new has been born!”

The second and third part of the invitation is “take” and “learn.” *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”* A yoke is something that puts together two animals to pull a wagon or plow or such. Here is a picture of a yoke:



When we “come” to Christ by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit, *He gives* us rest. When we “take” His yoke and “learn”, *we find* rest, that deeper rest of surrender and obedience.

There are two kinds of peace that come from being yoked with Christ, and you can make a note of these in your Bibles. The first is peace *with* God, and we find this in Romans 5:1 – *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The second peace that you can make a note of is the peace *of* God, and we find this spelled out for us in Philippians 4:6-8 – *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

A *yoke* was intended to ease the discomfort in carrying a heavy load. But it also symbolized obedience and the acceptance of responsibility. When we submit to Christ, we are yoked to Him. Here's the great news: He has just the yoke that is tailor-made for each of us individually; our individual lives and needs. The burden of doing His will is not a heavy one, as we see in 1 John 5:3-4 – *This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world...*

This doesn't mean we won't sin, what it means is when we are yoked with Christ, when we take and learn from Him, we are no longer defined by sin. Since we are yoked with Jesus, we are not alone when it comes to living the lives He wants us to. He is there with us, and helps us along the journey if we “come”, “take” and “learn” from Him, submitting to His Lordship. As we learn more about Him, we find a deeper peace, because we trust Him more. With the deeper peace and trust, comes a better understanding of His Word and Will, which in turn means the ‘burden’ of fully following Him gets lighter and lighter.

But you know what I found very interesting about this passage as we are reading it this Labor Day Weekend? As I said, I did a search for the word ‘rest’ in the Bible, and then looked at the Greek and Hebrew of the word. I really encourage you to make a note of this in your Bibles!

In the Greek the word rest is ἀναπαύω [*anapauro* /an·ap·ow·o/], and it means “to cease from any movement or labor in order to recover and collect his strength.” Makes sense, no big surprise there, but it also means – and here's the thing to make note of – “to keep quiet, of calm and patient expectation.”¹

Calm and patient expectation. There's something better coming. Did you hear me? **THERE'S SOMETHING BETTER COMING!!** We go to Jesus to get rest from all the stuff this world can

¹ Enhanced Strong's Lexicon: 373 ἀναπαύω

put on our shoulders, and as we rest in Him we remember this world is not the end. We have the expectation of something better. It's a promise from Jesus Himself.

As you look in the Hebrew, it gets even more interesting because the word for rest is "Shabbat", often pronounced in English as "Sabbath." A time of connection with our God and of having our hearts touched by His Spirit.

"Come to me," Jesus says. "Come to me just as you are. Stop chasing around after all the other things that are not helping, and let me clean you up and make you new. I have a plan and a purpose for your life, and the 'cost' is simply surrendering your will to my perfect will and plan for you. I have so much to tell you, so much to teach you. So much to touch your heart with; so much to give you a real rest. And that's not all: the best part's still coming. Rest in me, and trust in me, that this is not as good as it gets. Have your Sabbath rest of connection with me, and the belief and trust of the peace *with* God and the peace *of* God through me, and the heaven that waits for you just beyond the skin of this world." It's His promise to those who call on Him as their only Lord and Savior for today, tomorrow, and every day after.

Would you pray with me please?

Jesus, thank You for Your invitation to simply come to you, submit to you, learn from You and be changed by You. Thank You for the peace You give and the hope that comes from You for a better world to come.

Help us to take Your yoke again and again and again. Forgive us for walking away from You, and shrugging off Your yoke, and trying to go about this life on our own. You are the one who heals, the one who comforts, and the one who leads.

Thank You for the time we can spend here today on this Sabbath Day. The best is yet to come Jesus, and that is the day when we will see You face-to-face, and hear Your own voice tell those who have turned their lives over to You through the working of Your Holy Spirit, "Welcome Home, my child."

Amen