

I Will Give You Rest

Sermon Theme: Christ calls you to himself and promises you rest.

Text: Matthew 11:25–30

Other Lessons: Zechariah 9:9–12; Psalm 145:1–14; Romans 7:14–25a

Goal: That hearers who labor and are heavy laden by sin would come to Jesus for his promised rest.

Rev. David P. Kuhfal, pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Neligh, Nebraska, and Trinity Lutheran Church, Elgin, Nebraska

Liturgical Setting

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. The Antiphon of the *Introit* reinforces this theme: “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.” Likewise, the *Collect* petitions our “gracious God,” whose “mercy attends us all our days,” to “be our strength and support amid the wearisome changes of this world, and, at life’s end, grant us Your promised rest.” The *Old Testament Reading* emphasizes the Lord’s coming, “righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey,” again specifically to bring what the weary need: “peace” (Zech 9:9, 10). The *Epistle* for the Pentecost season is a semicontinuous reading of Romans. Nevertheless, it, too, contributes to the day’s theme. After St. Paul has verbalized the Christian’s frustrating struggle with the Law, he also finds solace, someone to “deliver [him] from this body of death”: “Thanks be to God *through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Rom 7:24–25, emphasis added).

Textual Notes

Vv 25–27: These verses deal with election. It is the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, who has hidden (*ekrupsas*) and revealed (*apekalupsas*) his gracious will (*eudokia*). The Father’s gracious will is revealed in the Son.

V 28: kopiōntes, “labor,” a present participle expressing continuous action.

pephortismenoi, perfect passive participle expressing a state of weariness.

anapausō, “to cause to rest,” “to give rest,” “to refresh”; future tense.

Vv 28–30: Note the many uses of the first person. It is in Christ that true rest is found.

Sermon Outline

2. The Law brings only burdens and weariness.
1. Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them rest.

CHRIST CALLS YOU TO HIMSELF AND PROMISES YOU REST.

Sermon

Everyone has those times when what they’re trying to do burdens and wearies them—for some it’s math, for others it’s things mechanical, for others it’s understanding people. You know the feeling. You try to do something, but you just can’t get it. No matter how hard you try, you can’t succeed. The more you try, the more frustrated you get. You want to accomplish—all by yourself—what you’re doing, but you find you don’t have what’s necessary to get the job done. Your inability becomes a burden, a huge frustration. Finally, being unable to accomplish your task can wear you down, and you become weary of ever completing it. You despair of your wretchedness.

2.

The way many people falsely understand salvation leads to this same despair. Salvation by works of the Law—trying to be saved by what you do is like trying to accomplish something but never attaining it. The Law tells you what you’re to do but doesn’t enable you to comply with its commands; rather, it causes you 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 you 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 you look truthfully at yourself, your life, like Paul’s, is a constant struggle with sin. (*Insert appropriate examples.*) You don’t do the good you desire. You’re a sinner, a wretched sinner just like Paul, deserving eternal death in hell. This is what you confess when you say, “I, a poor miserable sinner” in the liturgy.

Most of the time you try to hide this wretchedness from yourself. You try to push this out of your mind, not thinking about it or justifying your actions. You come up with wise and learned schemes to justify yourself. (*Again insert appropriate examples.*) While you might try to hide the fact that you’re a sinner deserving damnation, the burden of your guilt remains. For example, you’ve done some evil to a friend or family member. (*Insert a particular example.*) You 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.

1.

God the Father does not want you to be weary and suffer the burden of your sin. Therefore, he has revealed to you 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” (vv 25–27). The Father’s will is seen only through his Son, Jesus. All things, including your 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 your sin from you and to give you his rest. He took your sins to the cross. On the cross, he died for your sins, removing them. Believers in Christ, like you, 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 your sin, he calls on you to become little children, admitting your 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 <seriously will> 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 <neglect and> 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>. (FC Ep XI 7)

First, as you heard, Christ came to bear the burden of the Law for you. He fulfilled all that the Law requires in your place. Second, Christ came to bear the burden of your sin for you. 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 your burden of sin. With the crossbeam on his shoulders like a yoke, Christ took your 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 you 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” (vv 28–30). Christ calls you to himself and promises you rest—forgiveness and the comfort it brings.

His Word and call enable you to come. By your own reason and strength you cannot believe in Jesus Christ, your Lord, or come to him. But today the Holy Spirit calls you by the Gospel, enlightens you with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps you in the true faith. The Holy Spirit does for you the same as what he did for Paul and the whole Christian Church on earth: he keeps you with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church, he daily and richly forgives all your sins and the sins of all believers.

Today,

CHRIST CALLS YOU TO HIMSELF AND PROMISES YOU REST.

As you heard in today’s Antiphon, “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, you have rest. You have the true rest of not having to carry the burden of your guilt or having to fear its condemnation. Therefore, you are bold to pray as you 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 in Christ, for he calls you to himself and promises you rest.