

Pentecost 6 – July 8, 2023

Text: Matthew 11:25-30

Theme: Can't Do it Alone

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 someone's behavior. 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 doubtful of ever completing it. You can just lose hope.

The way many people mistakenly 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 having what you need to attain it. The Law tells you what you are to do but does not enable you to do it; rather, it frustrates you. Trying to live up to the Law always ends in despair or self-righteousness. Either you despair because you will never be able to fulfill the Law or you are smugly self-righteous thinking (thinking quite incorrectly) that you have fulfilled the Law with your work. The Law cannot save;

it can only bring knowledge of sin. Trying to attain salvation through the Law 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.

Paul finally says, **"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"** Our lives, like Paul's, are a constant struggle with sin. We all desire to do what is right but we do not do the good we desire. We are sinners, wretched sinners, 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 we try to hide this wretchedness from others and even from ourselves. We try to push it out of our mind, not thinking about it or justifying our behavior. We might try to hide the fact that we're sinners, but the burden of our guilt remains. That is when we say, we don't feel forgiven. We hear the words of forgiveness but the guilty feeling is still there and Satan uses that feeling to whisper in our ears that we have not done enough, that we are still held liable for whatever sin we committed.

Most of the nonsense that goes on in our lives revolves around this lie from Satan that we are capable of living a sinless life and that we should feel horrible the rest of our lives for sinning. For instance, an example from a former time in another parish. A man truly believed that something he had done had caused his son to be an alcoholic. He cannot live with the fact that he might have sinned as a parent, so he had to find some other reason for the son's alcoholism. Soon this man had alienated his son, his other children, his wife and many friends by blaming all of them for contributing to his son's alcoholism. It would have been so much better for him to simply confess to God whatever he believed his sin to be and then received forgiveness from God and let go of the guilt and blame and shame. Maybe he failed as a parent. Maybe it had nothing to do with his parenting. We will probably never know, but one thing is for sure. He alienated many people and hurt many people in his effort to justify his sin rather than confess it and be done with it.

God the Father does not want us to live weary and burdened lives under the yoke of sin. That is why Jesus came. Jesus prayed in our text,

I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, 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.

The Father's will is seen through his Son, Jesus. All things, including our sins, have been handed over to the Son. He was sent to reveal his Father's gracious will to us. He entered Jerusalem the last time humble and riding on a beast of burden to take the burden and weariness of our sin from us and to give us his rest. He took our sins to the cross. Now we find true rest for our souls in him who has taken the burden of our sin from our shoulders and put it on his own.

Instead of acting wise and understanding, hiding our sin, justifying our sin, he calls on us to become little children, confessing our sinfulness to him and receiving his gift of forgiveness.

Today, Jesus calls all who labor and are heavy laden and wearied 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.

Here is the best gift of all. His call enables 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. That's why we can live an unburdened, easy life. Don't try to carry the weight of your sin. You can't do it. And why would you do it when Jesus is carrying it for you? Let it go and enjoy an unburdened life.