

# “True Rest”

## Matthew 11:25-30

July 6, 2014

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Rest is a much needed and earnestly sought after commodity in our busy world today with its hectic pace. This is clearly shown on a holiday weekend like this one when so many people, as soon as the holiday comes upon us, take off, searching for peace and rest. But will they find it? It all depends. Do we know the cause of our weariness? Do we know the way to find rest? And, most importantly, will that rest last?

When considering rest and the need for rest, we immediately think of physical tiredness. We can become tired from any number of physical activities. We can work too hard. We can play too hard. With our busy dawn to midnight 24/7 routines, we can simply live too hard. An excessive amount of any physical activity can tire us out.

Becoming tired is more than an unpleasant feeling. It can be dangerous, as well. This is something many people refuse to see and are almost embarrassed to admit. It seems to almost be a badge of honor and dedication to be tired. People brag about how many hours a week they work. Young athletes are proud of how much they work out or how many games a week they play. To admit the need for rest is either a wistful wish (after all, who could possibly slow down?) or a sign of weakness and lack of dedication to the task at hand. But becoming tired and weary can lead to sickness, injury, or a breakdown of the body.

So, on a 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend or any time we can spare, we seek out rest. But how do we rest? The Lord had a good idea in the Old Testament Sabbath law. All ordinary work was forbidden. People were simply to do nothing, but attend to the Word of God and rest.

But that kind of resting seems to be a waste of time in our “on the go” culture. We try to get rest by just exchanging one busy set of activities for another. We work hard at our job and then we work hard at our play – sports, camping, vacation trips, and so on. I’ve seen so many parents

haggard and worn out from hauling their kids around to activity after activity. The kids look pretty tired, too. Have you ever returned home from what was supposed to be a restful vacation only to feel that you needed a vacation to recover from your vacation? You may have been involved in leisure activities and non work-related activities, but you still got tired and didn't get any rest.

The rest which we try to get or think we are getting has some flaws and weaknesses. As I said sometimes our activities for resting give us no rest but only increase our weariness. And even if we do manage to get some rest, it is, at best, only temporary. After our vacation, after our weekend of camping, after our day off, we are soon back to our hectic and wearying regular schedules, only to become worn out again. Wouldn't it be nice to get some real and lasting rest? It IS possible.

There is another kind of weariness. Most people would call it mental or emotional weariness. I would call it spiritual weariness. The weariness comes from various emotions we feel or attitudes we have like worry, tension, pressure, fear and guilt. The Word of God traces all of these emotions and attitudes back to one common source: sin and the separation from a kind and loving God which it causes.

Many people choose to ignore these signs of spiritual weariness or feel that they are just a part of life today. There is a great danger in ignoring or not taking care of this spiritual weariness. This spiritual weariness can affect the physical. I'm sure you know of people who have become physically sick from worry, tension, pressure, or guilt. Maybe you've experienced that yourself.

Even more dangerous than affecting the physical, spiritual weariness can affect the eternal. Guilt comes as a result of sin. Sin is the cause of death. Death leads to hell and hell is an eternal separation from God and all that is good.

Others think they are smart enough and wise enough to handle these spiritual issues apart from God. They have everything figured out. If there is a big hole in your soul caused by worry, tension, guilt or other signs of spiritual weariness, then just cover it up. Have more fun, Acquire more stuff. Do more activities. In other words, just get your mind off of your spiritual weariness.

If that doesn't work, then anesthetize the problem. Drugs or alcohol can make you forget about your problems and not feel your weariness for awhile.

If that doesn't work, look within yourself – within your soul – for the answer. Meditate and cleanse your soul of all weariness. Think only positive thoughts about yourself and your circumstances. That should help, shouldn't it?

These methods of the wise and understanding people (as our text calls them) can, at best, give us only temporary rest from the weariness of our souls. At worst, these methods only mask our problems or distract us from them. We *think* we are getting rest, but we remain weary.

For those people who think they can handle things apart from God through their own wisdom and understanding (including self-professing Christians), Jesus says that the Father has hidden the true way to spiritual rest and thanks Him for that. That seems to be a very scary thought. The Father does not hide things from people because He doesn't love them or doesn't wish them to have peace and rest. He does it because they are not interested in it. Try to go it alone and refuse God's mercy and He will let you do it.

Instead, the Father has revealed true peace and lasting rest to little children. Here, Jesus doesn't mean just those who are chronologically young (although it does include them) nor people who are innocent as children. As we know (and the Bible teaches), no one, not even little children are innocent. Here, Jesus is referring to people who are like infants in that they have no wisdom of their own and are totally dependent upon God's grace and they know it. To those who recognize that they bring nothing to the table and are totally dependent upon God's grace, the Father reveals the way to lasting peace and true rest.

True rest comes when there is lasting peace. Lasting peace comes only when there is peace with God. Peace with God was achieved, not by anything we do or refrain from doing, but by what God and God alone has done. He sent His Son, Jesus, to make peace with God through the shedding of His blood upon the cross as payment for sin. This is absolute foolishness to people who

consider themselves wise. The fact that God does it all is an insult to people who think they can or should find rest on their own.

Nevertheless, by Jesus' death on the cross as sacrifice for the sin of the world, there is eternal peace with God for all who will believe it. In that peace with God, there is true spiritual rest. You know that and believe that, not because you are wiser or are more understanding than others, but because the Son of God has revealed that to you purely as a gift of grace.

So Jesus issues a gracious invitation to all people, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden," This invitation is for all who are struggling with weariness of any and every kind – those who are working hard to find peace and rest in a turbulent and hectic world; those who are working hard to make peace with God and find rest for their souls; those who are laden with stress, tension, fear, and worry; and those who are laden with guilt because of the size or quantity of their sins against God and against one another.

To all of those people – to you – Jesus says, "Come to me...and I will give you rest." The rest Jesus gives does not come by Jesus removal of the effects of sin which cause us stress, tension, fear and worry, but by His removal of all sin from our account with God and the peace which that removal brings. Jesus says, "Take my yoke up you." A yoke is an old wooden device for leading cattle as they plowed. Jesus is saying, "Come. Be led by me. Follow me."

And what will you discover when you follow Jesus in His teaching and His practice?" Jesus says, "And learn from me that I am gentle and lowly in heart." In all of all of our weariness brought on by our sin and the effect of sin in the world, Jesus will always gently receive us and always graciously forgive us, time and time again.

"You will find rest for your souls," Jesus says. The word "soul" here refers to the totality of our being. In other words, Jesus is not promising just a physical respite when we wear ourselves out physically or a spiritual high when we are down emotionally. He is promising us much, much more.

He is talking about complete and eternal rest through that which we confess every Sunday that we believe in: the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

You may be thinking, “Yeah, that’s great but that’s far off in the future sometime. I need rest now.” That’s why we are here now. Many seem to think that public worship is, at best, a duty that we must fulfill or, at worst, a burden which we must endure. It is neither. In Divine Service, we are rehearsing for and getting a taste of our eternal rest. It is an opportunity to remove ourselves from the pressure and hectic pace of the world which wearies us and to slow down and come into the presence of our Lord. In that sense, it is a physical rest, but it’s much more

Divine Service is a chance for us to rest and, as the name implies, let God serve us. Here God washes us in the font and, every Sunday thereafter, reminds us that we are cleansed as we begin Divine Service with the words by which we were baptized. Here, God forgives and restores us to Himself. Here God speaks to us, teaching us His Word and encouraging us. Here, God feeds us with a heavenly banquet, featuring the body and blood of the Lamb, Jesus, who has taken away the sin of the world. This nourishes our faith and gives us peace.

This is a taste of the heavenly banquet that is to come. Yet that taste gives us true rest in the midst of the chaos which is our life. It sustains us now until we come into the Lord’s presence the next time. It will keep us rested and sustained until we are in the direct presence of the Lord forever.

I hope you had a restful holiday weekend. I hope all those who have gone camping also found rest, as well. Now, for many of us, it’s back to the grind and more weariness. But for true rest which will last forever, remember Jesus’ words, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Come to Christ, present among us in Word and Sacrament, and you will find eternal rest for your entire being. Amen.