

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 7
July 19, 2020
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran
Rest for the weary

—Matthew 9:35-10:8

We need rest. But rest can be elusive. You plan a trip or a vacation months in advance, you count down the days, but then it finally comes and before you know it it's over and back to the daily grind. You plop down at the end of a long workday and melt into your armchair, but the alarm buzzes for a new day—right back at it. You find a moment of rest when you forget all the troubles in the world and in your life, but so quickly you get snapped back to reality and all those troubling thoughts flood right back into your mind. I personally have trouble resting. I find myself working to finish a project and reach a goal, but as soon as it's done I fail to rest and find satisfaction in the finished work because there's another task or another project to dive right into. Maybe you've felt similarly—you labor seemingly to no end. Even when the work is finished, there's that strange nagging feeling that there's still more to be done. We struggle to truly find rest, and not just physically and mentally, but also spiritually.

In today's lesson, Jesus invites to himself all who are weary and burdened, all who have labored to the point of exhaustion and those who are so weighed down with a burden too heavy to carry. And to such people he offers rest. What a generous offer! Who would pass that offer up? And yet many people do... including us at times.

In the section of Matthew right before Jesus offers rest for the weary, ***Jesus denounces most of the cities in which his miracles had been performed because they did not repent.*** So many people came to see the miracles Jesus performed. They saw the blind receive sight, the lame walked, those with leprosy were healed, the deaf could hear, the dead were raised, and the gospel was preached. But at the end of the day, so many people did not repent. They failed to confess their sin and their need for what Jesus really came to offer. They said no thank you to the generous offer Jesus made and chose to bear the burden of their sin all on their own shoulders. Either they didn't think that their sin existed or that it was that serious or they didn't trust that Jesus really had the power to do what he promised. And so there they went; living and laboring to no end.

There is no rest for the wicked. Not true rest. The wicked may find fleeting rest and a false sense of comfort in their labors, but really, it's a useless spinning of the tires. The unrepentant labors in vain thinking that his way is valid, the life he lives is acceptable to God. But he never knows if he's done enough. All he can do is keep trying and try harder and harder to no avail. He's too prideful to admit he can't do it; he can't please God. He's too smart to believe the gospel. And so, he carries on right past Jesus with a load of sin that will drag him down to hell. There is no rest for the unrepentant heart.

Ask yourself this: Do I at times find myself lacking spiritual rest because I'm lacking repentance? There's no relief from the burden of my sin if I fail to recognize and confess it. There's no rest from laboring under its crushing load if I think that I will claw my way back in to God's favor by striving to be better or try harder. There is certainly no rest if I think I can continue in a wicked, sinful way, hoping God will understand.

Or ask yourself this: Do I lack spiritual rest because I lack full trust in Christ? Do I ever doubt that I am fully forgiven and think there's more to be done? If we think that what Christ has done to save us isn't enough, how could we be so foolish to think we could do enough?

Or let's ask ourselves this: Do we lack true rest because we search for it in all the wrong places? What if by planning that trip you hope find relief from the trouble of sin in the world and in your life? What if by working yourself ragged you are really trying to distract yourself from the guilt of your own sin or make up for it? What if longing for the next adventure or the next vacation replaces a longing for God's grace? Then true rest eludes us.

Have you ever spent time working on something only to find out it's all been in vain? It's a devastating feeling, isn't it? You spend hours, weeks, months, working on something and your boss rejects it, you've done it all wrong. Think of the devastation on Judgment Day of standing before the Lord and realizing all your labor, all the good things you've done, all your striving to be a good person count for nothing, and the weight of your sin crush you to eternal death. That would be devastating.

But what if right now, and each day we came to the realization that all our labors all our striving to be right with God are in vain and useless? There's actually great relief in that because to the humble and the weak and the weary soul that finally realizes all our effort is in vain, Jesus reveals true rest.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Jesus gives rest to all who are weary and burdened—those with repentant hearts, hearts burdened by sin and hearts that long for the kind of rest that only Jesus gives. Remember Jesus rebuked the many who didn’t repent. They weren’t burdened by their sin, or at least they didn’t think they were overloaded. They thought that they could carry their own weight and do just fine without Jesus. Jesus invites us to come to him with humble and penitent hearts—hearts that confess our sin and confess our inability to carry the crushing weight of God’s law. We confess that all our efforts to find rest apart from him have been foolish and in vain. You come to Jesus with burdens of your own, with guilt, with failures and unfinished tasks. He gives lasting rest to weary souls.

Our souls find rest in Jesus whose labor wasn’t in vain. We rest in a job well done by Jesus. Jesus didn’t merely try to keep his Father’s commands; he kept them perfectly. He fulfilled the law perfectly for us, in our place. We rest in his righteousness, not our own, but his righteousness becomes our very own through faith. Though he had no sin of his own, he bore the burden of our sin all the way to a cross. The weight of our sin and the wrath of God should have crushed us to death, but **he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. By his wounds we are healed.** His work was not in vain. God raised him from the dead and sits down the Father’s right hand because his work is finished.

I don’t have to worry and spin my tires wondering if I’ve done enough to appease God today. I haven’t. Christ has done all things well for me. I don’t have to live under the weight of guilt and shame and fear that God will crush me for my sin. Christ died, Christ was raised and he rests from his work as his Father’s side. And he invites us to rest in his finished work.

What a gracious invitation... **“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.”** The yoke of the law—God’s demand of perfection—was like a yoke of slavery. It saddled us with a burden too heavy to bear. The yoke of sin—being controlled by the sinful flesh—drags a soul to despair and death. The yoke of Jesus—being connected to Christ—is nothing like that. It lifts the crushing weight of the law. It rescues the soul from the depths of hell. Under the yoke of Christ, we’re not cumbered the load of our sin to carry and more guilt to bear. We are covered with grace that carries us. Under the yoke of Christ, we do have crosses to bear. We will still have struggles and difficulties as Jesus’ disciples. But he promises that these things are light and momentary compared to the true rest we have in him and the eternal rest that awaits us. As we bear these crosses now and still carry burdens of different kinds, we have a Savior who gives us rest.

“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.”