

## Seventh Sunday after Pentecost July 23, 2017

Matthew 11:25-30 (EHV) - <sup>25</sup>At that time, Jesus continued, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from clever and learned people and have revealed them to little children. <sup>26</sup>Yes, Father, because this was pleasing to you. <sup>27</sup>Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him. <sup>28</sup>"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

### Introduction

What's the mathematical difference – that's a subtraction problem for those of you who aren't acquainted with ancient, "non-common-core" terminology – what's the difference between the hours of sleep that you need and the hours of sleep that you get?

For as long as I can remember, the key number was 8 – an average adult should aim to get 8 hours of sleep per night. But I read an article not that long ago that stated that recent studies are suggesting that 7 hours is the optimum. It said that getting too much sleep leads to health problems such as diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, and higher rates of death. One quote: "People who reported they slept 6.5 to 7.4 hours had a lower mortality rate than those with shorter or longer sleep." Now I don't feel so bad!

### Theme: Listen as Jesus teaches about rest.

Last weekend, we heard how Jesus didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. This week's Gospel Lesson almost seems to state the opposite. Don't worry, though – the puzzle pieces snap perfectly together. This morning, **LET'S LISTEN AS JESUS TEACHES ABOUT REST**. In the first few verses, **Jesus explains why rest is needed**. In the last few verses, **Jesus invites us to take the rest that he gives**.

### Part I: Jesus explains why rest is needed.

They say that children need more sleep than adults, but I'm not so sure I agree with that. I think it's just that kids have more *opportunities* to sleep than adults, and adults learn how to *get by* with less. We need rest because we get tired. We get tired because we work, we play, we run after kids, we do what we can to keep a household together.

That's also the context of Matthew 11. In the previous chapter, Jesus had sent out his twelve disciples – plus 72 others according to Luke's account – to do kingdom work. Luke also informs us that they returned to Jesus' side sometime before he gave this little lesson on rest. Jesus hadn't been idle during their mission activity. He'd also stayed busy healing people and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom up in Galilee.

It wasn't all enjoyable work. Jesus had spoken of some of the forms of persecutions they'd endure. We heard last Sunday how Jesus predicted that proclaiming the full truth of law and gospel can turn even family members against each other. Some of John the Baptist's disciples came to Jesus to find out if their faith was in the right place. After pointing to the abundant evidence, Jesus spoke of how the people mostly passed John off as crazy or demon possessed. They listened to neither his law nor his gospel

preaching. The same was true of the Galilean cities in which Jesus had preached and performed miracles. They rejected the message out of hand, so he condemned them.

It's at that time and under those circumstances that Jesus says in the hearing of his disciples: **"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from clever and learned people and have revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, because this was pleasing to you. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him."**

How Jesus could denounce Galilean cities in one breath, and in the next offer praises to God goes beyond my understanding. But then, that's the whole point, isn't it? The administration of the kingdom and the reception by people of either law or gospel goes beyond our understanding. It's God's good pleasure to hide or reveal those truths to whom he wills.

How can the simple truths of mankind's sinfulness remain hidden to the scholar? It happens when we try to pro-rate sins or to re-define sins or to just do away with sin entirely. How can the simple truths of God's salvation remain hidden to the scholar? It's when we try to find "a catch" in his plan of grace, or when we try to diagram the unsearchable mysteries of God's election, or when we allow our legalistic way of thinking to take us over. Basically, God hides the truth from those who make faith the slave of human reason instead of vice versa.

The true truth of the kingdom, Jesus says, is through him and him alone. Speaking to his human nature, he's been made 100% responsible for the administration of God's kingdom. (Speaking to his divine nature, he's had that responsibility from eternity.) Yet he remains the one, true immortal God, and is in a relationship with the Father that goes beyond compare or explanation. People might come to *know about Jesus*, but they can only *know Jesus* – and then also the Father – as they believe in him as the Savior from sin with a childlike trust.

## **Transition**

Wanna get away? Need some rest? Jesus offers something a lot better than a nap or a vacation. Because preaching this message of the kingdom is hard work that so quickly saps our strength, Jesus invites us to take the rest that he gives.

## **Part II: Jesus invites us to take the rest that he gives.**

**"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, because 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 first question we might ask of this invitation is: Whom is it for? Who are the **"weary and burdened"**? It would certainly include all those faithful kingdom workers who are frustrated at seeing people reject God's only way to eternal life. But it would also include all those who are bearing a much more common burden, the immense burden of sin. Jesus' restful invitation, then, is for all.

But it's only those who recognize sin as a burdensome taskmaster and long for relief who truly appreciate the rest Jesus has to offer. Jesus never really says *how* to come to him, does he? He just says to come. The answer is in the invitation itself. It's purely a gospel invitation. The command itself changes the hearer's heart and he or she is then moved to respond.

The second question we might ask is in regard to the yoke that Jesus talks about. It's hard to understand any kind of yoke at all as a good thing. Taking rest and taking on another yoke – even a light one – don't seem to go hand-in-hand. Well, just what is the burden that Jesus asks us to take up? Is it following more rules? Is it a different attitude toward the laws of God? Maybe we need to start by understanding the illustration of a yoke. A yoke harnesses two things together. A yoke of oxen is a pair of animals hooked together so that they can work as a team. So then, Jesus is inviting us to link ourselves to him.

The wonderful and amazing thing, though, is that the heavy lifting, the straining, the backbreaking labor is all done. Jesus, the one who alone is “**gentle and humble in heart,**” bore the full burden of sin to Calvary's cross. It never could've been a team event! We were just a dead weight on our side of things. But now that the work has all been done, Jesus says to come to him and take up his yoke upon ourselves. And it's truly easy, because he did everything. It's truly light, because the weight of sin has been removed in its entirety.

Part of our rest is the joy of working in his kingdom. On one hand, we're yoked to Jesus and resting in the peace of sins forgiven. But at the very same time, we're yoked to Jesus who is the Lord of the Church and the eternal Prophet of good news that finds its source in his very self. As the chief Prophet, he's seen fit to entrust that message of good news to us, and gives us the privilege of sharing the rest and peace we have in him with the world of sinners around us who are still frantically trying to figure it all out ... but in vain. The invitation to take the rest that Jesus gives also means that we take and enjoy *and share* the rest that Jesus gives.

## **Conclusion**

Only we who are God's children can begin to understand how spiritual rest and kingdom work are simultaneous. By all means, get your 6, 7, 8 (or more) hours of sleep each night so you can recoup your energy. But then use your replenished energy as you work side-by-side with your Savior to do the work of his kingdom to his glory and to the salvation of souls. Amen.