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“The Peace and Rest You Need - in Christ”

Text: Matthew 11:25-30 (Romans 7:14-25a; Zechariah 9:9-12)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That's sounds good. In fact, that's sounding *particularly* good to me today, because I'm tired. Being away with our youth at the Higher Things conference in Gainesville, Florida was a great week, but it's a long, tiring week. All the driving down and back, all the things going on there, teaching and preaching, and staying up past my usual early bedtime . . . yeah, I'm tired. I could use a little rest.

So . . . I came here. To church. To rest.

Now, maybe you're thinking: *Wait a minute, Pastor. This isn't rest for you. You have to teach and preach and do your Pastor things here, too. This isn't rest - you're working.* I suppose it seems that way, and I guess I even think of it that way sometimes. But what about those words of Jesus? ***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** This is where Jesus is, in His Word, in His Sacrament. So when I'm tired, here is where I need to be, don't you think?

But we *don't* think that way, do we? That's why when you're tired you've skipped church - whether it's a Sunday after a long week, or a midweek service after a long day. Is it because we, perhaps, think of church as *more* work, as a duty, a responsibility, another thing *I* have to do? And you have so much of that already, the other five or six days of the week. So you need rest? Better stay home.

But it's not that way at all. The devil has deceived us! ***Come to me***, Jesus says, ***when you labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** Here, then, is rest for you, from Him. The rest you really need.

And it really is. And an example of that for me is Holy Week. A lot of folks think Holy Week is the toughest week of the year for pastors, with all the special services each day and all the extra sermons to write. And it's busy, no doubt about it. But Holy Week is also a week that refreshes me like no other. I spend so much time in the Word and prayer that by the end of the week, I am revitalized and well rested. The very thing Jesus has promised to do.

It was that way in the Old Testament too. The day on which the people were to gather together for church was called - *not by accident* - the Sabbath day - the day *to rest*. But just doing nothing didn't fulfill the meaning of the day. It was the day of rest when God served them and gave them what they needed. Six days they were to labor and the seventh day they were to rest . . . *by going to church*.

You see, we get it wrong when we think the rest that we need is just physical rest. The Pharisees and Sadducees kept getting that wrong too, accusing Jesus over and over again of breaking the Sabbath by working on it. *Their* version of work. But we shouldn't be so quick to absolutely divide things physical from things spiritual. Though that's drummed into our heads these days by the world, this division, this absolute separation of the physical and the spiritual.

For example there is the well-worn drumbeat of the separation of church and state, and the mindset that the one must have absolutely nothing to do with the other. Or the thinking of many that spiritual things are only mystical things and have nothing to do with the physical - with things like liturgy, and Sacraments, and Absolution. Or that you have a body and you have a soul but they don't really have anything to do with each other. Separation.

No. As a Christian you are 100% sinner and 100% saint. You were born 100% sinner and reborn from above in your Baptism 100% saint. But you are not one or the other. You are not 50-50, or even 51-49 on a good day. As long as you live in this world as a Baptized Christian you are both. Which means that you consist of both a sinful and rebellious body and mind, and a righteous and obedient body and mind. It's not that you have a good mind in a bad body, so if you could just escape this body everything would be alright. That's actually part of an ancient heresy called gnosticism. But you know that's not true. It's not that easy. Just think of all the impure and shameful thoughts and desires you have in your heart and mind. *They're sinful too*.

So when St. Paul uses terms like "flesh" and "spirit" in the Epistle that we heard today, he doesn't mean "body bad" and "spirit good" - he means the part of you you were born with and the part of you that was given to you. Your sinful human nature and your righteous new man. And, he says, they don't get along. Like quarreling siblings or bad neighbors, they fight, each wanting what they want and trying to force the other in you to knuckle under. And it has worn him out, this battle taking place within him. Doesn't he sound tired by the end of the reading? Tired when he says, finally: ***Who will deliver me from this body of death?*** And here's the answer: ***Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** Thanks be to God - *who gives us rest* - through Jesus Christ our Lord.

One of the things that has always amazed me in the Bible are those stories of when, for example, Moses goes up on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights and, it says, "*He neither ate bread nor drank water for forty day and forty nights*" (Exodus 34:28). Or when the

prophet Elijah eats a couple of cakes and drinks some water an angel brings him and with that he can travel 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19:8). Or when the disciples one day urge Jesus to eat and He says to them: *“I have food to eat that you do not know about”* (John 4:32). *“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4).

Or how about the story of when some friends brought to Jesus a man who was paralyzed, and Jesus said to him: *Son, your sins are forgiven* (Mark 2:5).

Maybe there’s a connection then, between the physical and the spiritual, that we shouldn’t be so quick to divide and separate.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

What’s wearing you out? What struggle, what worry, what concern, what striving, what busyness, what burden? What keeps you up at night or distracts during the day? Are you just trying to do your best or is there more to it than that? Are you really trying to prove your worth, trying to fit in, trying to convince yourself and the world that you matter? What is it for you that is weighing heavy on your mind and wearing you out more than any exercise ever could?

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

I’ll take a nap this afternoon, and if you know me you know I love naps! But the *rest* I need is here. The rest St. Paul needed is here. The rest you need is here. The rest that is found in Jesus Christ and Him crucified. In Him who came for you and fought for you (Zechariah 9) and now to give you what you need: *rest* from the labor and burdens and worries of this world, whatever they are for you.

Rest in **the forgiveness of your sins** - that you don’t have to make good for all your mistakes, they are forgiven in Jesus.

Rest in His **resurrection from the dead** - that you don’t have to worry about death because Jesus defeated that enemy for you and promised you everlasting life.

Rest in your **Baptism** - that you don’t have to prove yourself and earn your worth; that your value does not come just from what you can do and how much you achieve or how useful you are. You are a child of God. That makes you worth more than any of that other stuff ever could.

Rest in **His Supper** - that just as God fed Moses and Elijah, so He is feeding you, with Himself. Is this food for the body or food for the soul? **Yes**. Jesus doesn’t just feed part of you but all of you, just as He will raise all of you to everlasting life.

And finally, rest in **His blessing and peace** - that's what the angels announced at Jesus' birth, what Jesus won for you in His death and resurrection, and what is here given to you. Did you ever notice those are the last words you hear here every week, the final words of the Benediction? "*And give you peace.*" And you say "*Amen*" - gift received.

Those were also the last words we heard at Higher Things on Friday afternoon. Those words capped off a week where the youth and I went to two Divine Services, three Matins, three Vespers, three Evening Prayers, and four plenary gatherings and six smaller breakout sessions to hear and learn of God and His Word and love for us. And though we left tired, we also left well rested and well fed. And we can't wait to do it all again next year.

I pray that's what you will realize the Divine Service here is for you. Not work, not a burden, not an obligation, not something else you have to do in a world where you already have more than enough to do - but your oasis. In a world that takes more than it gives, in a body at war with itself, and with an enemy that's constantly attacking and wearing you down, here - as we say in one of our prayers - *is that peace which the world cannot give*. Here is the forgiveness and life and strength and rest you need. Here is your Saviour - not to take from you but give to you.

So tired? Worn out? You've come to the right place. ***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.