

9 July 2017
Pentecost 5

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“He’s God. You’re Not. Rest.”

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.

What is burdening you, causing you to groan and struggle and be heavy laden? Causing you pain and stress and worry? Whatever it is, Jesus wants it. He wants to take it from you. He wants to bear it for you. And give you peace and rest.

What is burdening you? I’ll tell you some of mine. Maybe you’ll recognize some of these kinds of things in your own life.

I want to be a perfect pastor. Or at least a good one. I want all my sermons to be spot on with all of you. Every week. I want to know exactly the right thing to say when I visit you in the hospital or when you’re suffering at home or have questions. I want to teach so that the Word of God will be alive for you - a book better than any other. I want to fix your problems. . . . And I can’t. I struggle. I fail. I don’t manage my time well enough. I am not able to be the pastor I want to be.

So Jesus says: That’s an awfully big burden you’re putting on yourself. I got this. It’s My Word - I’ll work through it. My Spirit will work through it, in My people. Let Me carry the burden. I can. I will. I’m God. You’re not. Rest.

I also want to be a perfect spouse and parent and son. Or at least a good one. I want to give my wife and children everything they need. I want my children to grow up without any danger or fear, with no problems or pains. Or if they get them and have them, I want to fix them. I want to protect them from all evil and show them the love of their heavenly Father at all times. . . . And I can’t. I fail. Things happen. I grow afraid and worry. I let other things get in the way.

So Jesus says: That’s an awfully big burden you’re putting on yourself. I got this. Remember: your children are My children too. I love them even more than you. I know the troubles, the challenges, the temptations; I faced them. Let Me carry the burden. I can. I will. I’m God. You’re not. Rest.

And then there's my sin. And oh, how Satan loves to remind me how I not only fail in these ways, but so many more. And even just as a Christian. Like Paul, I do those things I don't want to do. I do those things I know are wrong. I do what I hate. And I don't do what I want to do. I don't do what I know is right. I want to be this - but I am this instead. And then even when I manage to do what I want, my motives are wrong, or I am reluctant, grudging, or my pride ruins it. And like Paul, I don't understand. Why can't I be different?

And Jesus says: I got this, too. *Especially* this. I want the burden of your sins. All of them. In fact, I already bore that burden for you on the cross. I already took all your sins, your failures, your shortcomings, your inability, your wrong thoughts and motives. I forgive you. You are forgiven. You're baptized. I'm God. You're not. Rest.

Do you recognize any of that in you and your own life? Burdens are in no short supply. And while we have callings that God has given us in this life, people to care and provide for, and certainly, we want to do our best and that's okay. That's good. But when they become burdens, when they weigh heavy on us, when they cause us pain and stress and worry - that's not why God gave them to us. All that happens because I begin to think: *I'm God and He's not*. At least, that how I act. I take over. I have to do it. It's up to me.

That's a First Commandment problem: *You shall have no other gods*. My problem, and maybe your problem, is that when I labor and am heavy laden, it's because my other God . . . **it's me**.

But here, in these verses, Jesus doesn't scold. He doesn't wag His divine and human finger at us and tell us to shape up and do better. That's the burden we're already placing upon ourselves, and He'd just be making it that much heavier! Crushing. So He does something different. He says: there's a better way, you know. A better God than you.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Like when you are carrying a heavy load of packages and someone comes and takes it all from you and carries it for you. How good is that? Jesus says: *I got this for you*. I'm God. You're not. 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.***

Or in other words, Jesus wants to trade yokes and trade burdens with you. He wants your heavy and crushing ones and wants to give you His light and saving one. For that's the kind of God you *need*. And that's the kind of God you *have*. And it's Jesus who teaches us that. For He's the only one who can.

So three imperatives (commands) Jesus gave today. And notice - they were not: Shape up! Do better! Or, get your act together!

He says this: ***come to me***. That's the first imperative: ***come***. Come to Me, not yourself. My strength, not your strength. My wisdom, not your wisdom. I'm God. You're not. ***Come to me***.

Take my yoke upon you. That's the second imperative. Why do you keep burdening yourself? Why do you keep making it worse? The yoke you are putting on yourself is too heavy. You can't do it. My yoke is better, lighter, more pleasant, freeing, joy-giving. Satan wants you to think that My yoke is heavy and his is light. But it's not so. He's *deceiving you and misleading you in false belief and despair* (Small Catechism, Explanation to the Sixth Petition). ***Take my yoke upon you and . . .***

Learn from me. That's the third imperative. Don't sit in satan's school and learn from him. ***Learn from me***.

And what do we learn? We learn what kind of God we have. That as Jesus said today, that our God, is gentle and lowly in heart. That Jesus is kind and forgiving, and humble. A serving God. A burden-lifting God. A God who wants to trade places with you - taking your sin and giving you His forgiveness. Taking your cross and giving you His throne. Taking your burden and giving you His freedom. Taking your hell and giving you His Paradise.

And when you look at Jesus, when you look at His cross, and see that, learn that, then you know God. For as Jesus said: ***no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him***. God in the manger. God growing up in Nazareth. God teaching. God touching and healing lepers. God taking children up in His arms. God welcoming outcasts. God having compassion. God coming into Jerusalem on a donkey. God being arrested. God on trial. God on the cross. God dead and laid in a tomb. ***Learn from Jesus***. That's the kind of God you have.

God risen from the dead. God giving peace. God baptizing, God absolving, God feeding, God teaching. God still lifting burdens. God victorious. God coming again. ***Come, take, learn***. Come, take, and eat. That's the kind of God you have.

He's God. You're not. That's good. Rest. And not just rest now, but rest forever. ***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest***.

Think of all the people in the Scriptures who did that. Sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, parents with dying children, parents with demon-possessed children, poor old women, rich young men. None turned away. Jesus' easy yoke and light burden there for all.

And for you. For struggling sinners, conflicted parents, imperfect spouses, not-very-Christian-acting-Christians, and pastors who fall short. For you. For those who mourn, those who are bitter, the angry, the hurt, those used up and kicked to the side of the road

by others. For you. For the worried and anxious, the troubled and fearing. For you. Whatever it is making you heavy laden . . . **come to me**, Jesus says, and I will trade. I want it. **I will give you rest**. He'll take it and drown it in the font. He'll take it and expunge it from your record with forgiveness. He take it and let it chew Him up so that you can chew Him up and feed on Him. So that you can leave here today and rejoice.

Which is what the prophet Zechariah said:

***Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.***

Or if he were here today he would say it like this:

***Rejoice greatly, O Saint Athanasius!
Shout aloud!
For behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
righteous and having salvation **for you**,
humble and mounted in water and words and bread and wine.***

To trade - your burden for His.

To set you free.

To give you rest.

Come, take, and live.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.