

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 9, 2017

Text: Matthew 11:25-30

Theme: "Rest Secret"

What are your rest secrets? Do you have a winding down routine? That's good for children and adults alike. You don't eat or drink as bedtime approaches. You turn off the tablets and computers and stop texting. Maybe you read from a printed book, not off a screen. You close your eyes, take some deep breaths. You concentrate on nothing maybe. You are trying to let your brain wind down, convince it that it's time to stop analyzing the days events and not time to start processing the anticipated events of tomorrow. These suggestions are not well kept secrets.

Maybe the secret is you don't always rest so well. You don't turn off those screens; you do eat and drink, and you don't take those deep breaths. Maybe you do follow this routine and the brain just doesn't want to shut down.

Today we consider the secret for good rest. Now that could result in a good night's sleep. But we are speaking of more than needed sleep. We look for the exhale of "it's going to be okay." Who doesn't want that rest?

People of all ages have sought it. It was so with the disciples of John. Some of these men were sent to Jesus by John. We read of it in the first part of Matthew 11. They were looking for One who would fit in their Messianic basket. John had spoke of the Coming One, the One with the winnowing fork in His hand who would gather the wheat and cast the chaff into unquenchable fire. This is the One greater than John whose sandals John was not worthy to carry, the One who would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire.

John had pointed Jesus out, “Behold the Lamb of God” (John 1:36) When John’s disciples began to worry Jesus was drawing bigger crowds than John, John had said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:29) Well now considering John had been thrown in prison by Herod, he was definitely on the decrease. But was Jesus the coming one, was he the one to fit in the messianic basket? Where was that winnowing fork and where was the fire and Holy Spirit? Was this the one upon whom to rest their hopes? There seemed to be some doubt.

And these men were certainly not the only ones with questions. Jesus speaks of “this generation” (Matthew 11:16) He said there was no satisfying “this generation.” John was too austere for them and Jesus was too jovial. Jesus wasn’t fitting their basket. Nor was He the fit that the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida or Capernaum were looking for. The people in these cities saw the signs of the Messiah up close and still they did not repent. No, they were not ready to rest their futures on Jesus. They were looking for the Messiah who would usher in the age of plenty and rest from their enemies. Certainly the teachers of the law were not convinced that Jesus fit into their baskets. They were very good at tying heavy burdens of the oral traditions on others but were of no help in lifting them. And in their minds, if Jesus was the Messiah would he not commend them for such an eye for detail?

No, Jesus was not fitting the baskets of many. They would watch for another. And there were still others then who weren’t watching at all. They had plenty of good things in their baskets and didn’t want anyone upsetting that fact. They would do what was necessary to see that they still had plenty in their baskets to rest on.

So what do we put in our baskets? Do we have a basket of the building blocks of the necessities, even good things of life? In this basket would be things like jobs, or incomes

sources. Here would be house, cars, and clothing. Maybe we could also put in here health care that is available and affordable. We have another basket in which the gather the entertainment and diversions of life. I know I have all balls in here, but you can see they are different types, sizes and colors. It can remind us of sports of all sorts, those played, and those watched. It can also be hobbies, music, movies, video games, maybe lots of screens.

I have yet another basket with an assortment of objects. In here is something, perhaps that you are partial to when it comes to happiness. Here are the bells, maybe the whistles, that make it good for you. You see I have this entertaining bird, a fan, a fake diamond, a brass ring. Maybe we need a decent sized next egg. And why not even a little Jesus to top it all off?

So here are some baskets that may bring some happiness, but lasting rest? It can be hard to juggle, to keep track of them all. Maybe we even exalt these things, hold them up as what we think will bring that exhale of, "It's going to be okay." But somehow it is beyond us, hard to balance, and we don't know when it might just come crashing down.

But in contrast to all this, Jesus lays before us rest. He offers a pray to the Father in which He thanks God for revealing the secret to little children while He has hidden it from the wise and understanding (11:25). They refused to open their eyes to the Messiah who was before them. No, Jesus just didn't fit their baskets. Now they were hear woes. Those who tied heavy burdens on others we hear seven of those woes (Matthew 23:13,15,16,23,25,27,29). Those in Bethsaida and Chorazin heard, "woe to you...more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you." (Matthew 11:21-22) Jesus addresses Capernaum, "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades." (Matthew 11:23)

In contrast, Jesus does offer rest. “Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus gives answer to those disciple of John. “Go and tell John what you hear and see; the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the death are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them.” (Matthew 11:4-5) That was a yes to their question. He points them to the Messianic signs of Messianic times (Isaiah 34, 61) With His words, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me,” (vs 6) He is probably indicating that the ways of the true Messiah did not fit so neatly in the baskets of glory or that of immediate final judgment.

He was revealed, received to those knowing their need—little children, even babies (vs 25). They were needy and knew it, empty baskets crying out in need. They knew they were burdened down and longed for rest. In our epistle lesson from Romans seven, Paul knows and expresses his need. “Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24) He confessed himself to be “chief of sinners.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

And you and I, we are no better than Paul. Our struggle with sin is daily and ongoing. If left to our own strength it would crush us down into hell. And there is that constant strain maybe from the pursuit of happiness that just seems to elude our grasp.

But there is rest, rest in the one who gently and lowly in heart. The highest One comes in low. He comes righteous and having salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9) He comes to carry the whole load of righteousness. The yoke of the commandments, God’s perfect will, He carried and fulfilled, did so the whole time being tempted to cast it aside by accommodating the pride of the teachers of the law, or catering to the false hopes of “this generation,” or stepping in the devil’s snares. He plowed the perfect furrow of righteousness.

And then He carried the full load of our sin. Yes indeed He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world yours and mine included. He is like the beast that carries our burden. It is a heavy, sharp, harsh, accusing, even damning load. Here is rest, Jesus! Yes, the burden that we could never carry, burdensome like no other.

I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us
From the accursèd load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus
To wash my crimson stains
Clean in His blood most precious
Till not a spot remains. (LSB, 606, stanza 1)

He has you. It's going to be okay. There will life with Him like you cannot imagine. Exhale. It's okay right now He has you. He has new work for us to do, not burdensome, but as He says easy and light. Because serving Him is a delight. We don't have to ascend to heaven to know His well. He's brought it to us. He puts it right in our hands. It is summed up with the two statements love God and love your neighbor. He has prepared the good work beforehand for us to do. We don't know how it all fits together, but He does.

He has it worked out. As we serve Him, the risen, reigning and returning Lord Jesus opportunities are opened to speak of Him. More will be brought to faith and enter that rest, the secret to rest is the revealed Jesus.

And for tonight—turn with me to page 327 of *Lutheran Service Book*, there you see the Evening Prayer. Read it with me, please.

In the evening when you go to bed, make the sign of the holy cross and say:

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may also say this little prayer:

I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me.
Amen.

Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer.

We don't have Jesus in our baskets. No, He has us in His. For His sake. Amen