

Pentecost 5 7/9/23
Matthew 11:25-30 9A

“COME TO ME, ALL WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST.”

Jesus is teaching in one Sabbath day in a synagogue and there is a woman there. You really can't miss her. The reason you can't miss her is because she sticks out from the crowd by her physical appearance. She is bent over, unable to straighten herself. And, the Physician Luke tells us she had suffered from that crippling deformity for 18 years. She cannot look up to see the sun, the stars, or the moon; she cannot even lift up her head to look anyone in the face and see the twinkle in their eyes and their friendly smile. All she can see is the ground and the shuffling of her own feet before her.

A woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus. And, you know what the Bible says about that, right? The LAW says, “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman...you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones” (Deut. 22:22,24). In their hypocrisy, the scribes and Pharisees bring only the woman to Jesus, so there she stands, all alone. We can try to look into her heart and thoughts as she stands publicly humiliated, wondering what hurts the most – the thought of a stone hitting you upside your head or the shame and guilt of your sin?

A leper once came and knelt before Jesus. If it wasn't bad enough that that leper knew he was going to die from that horrible, incurable skin disease, he had to live out his earthly days separated from his family and friends, his own home. Everywhere he traveled, he had to cry out in loud voice, “Unclean, unclean,” so that everyone knew to avoid him, so they

would not become infected with that highly contagious disease. But, in the midst of the great crowd following Jesus, there, this leper comes to beg of Him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean" (Mt 8:2).

There are these three children of God, harassed by sin, and disease, and their neighbors. They are burdened; these people are heavy-laden and they need rest.

You know how they feel, don't ya? No one needs to tell you about laboring in this valley of the shadow of death, being heavy-laden, burdened by sin, disease, and, even, your neighbor?

Like David, your sin is ever before you. God promises you He forgives it and remembers it no more, but there is the father of all lies reminding you of your sin with his whispers. And sometimes, you don't even need the voice of Satan because you have the voice of your spouse, your child, your boss, reminding you of your sin and failure. And, you know the wages of that sin is death, but honestly, sometimes it's a toss-up of what is worse -- the death you know is coming or living every hour of every day with the guilt and shame and despair of your sin?

You know disease and infirmity. You know all-too-well what it is like to live life in a mortal body. You know the aches and pains, and daily medications. You know what it's like to watch your loved one wheeled off to surgery. You know what it is like to be the spouse or parent or child, and sit helpless by your spouse's or child's or parent's hospital bed, looking with the eyes of love on your loved one in their mortality.

You know what it's like to be crippled by the world. Yes, physically crippled, when your earthly body no longer works and functions the way your Creator made it to work. But, you also know what it's like when the

world tries to squeeze you into its mold; when you just don't fit in because you don't live by the world's rules.

You are here this morning because you labor, you are heavy-laden, you are burdened. You need rest.

Jesus says to you, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you 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" (vv. 28-30). That's what Jesus does – He gives us rest! Even if you struggle to believe His words, look at His actions.

To that poor woman with that crippling deformity, unable to straighten herself, the Great Physician says, "'Woman, you are freed from your disability.' And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight" (Lk 13:12-13).

You know what He said to the scribes and Pharisees when they brought the woman caught in adultery to Him? "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her," and they went away one by one (Jn 8:7). But, that's not how the story ends, is it? No, Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (Jn 8:11).

To that leper who knelt before Him, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched – touched -- him, saying, "'I will; be clean.' And immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Mt 8:3).

That's what Jesus does. He does not just promise rest; He GIVES rest, as only He can.

Jesus is able to give you rest from sin, death, and the devil because He was led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted for 40 days and

40 nights by the prince of demons. He endured lie after lie, but He did not sin. He was faithful for you, Dear Child of God, so that His faithfulness is counted as your faithfulness. And, He even cast out demons, so that you would know and be certain that He has power even over the demons of hell.

He crushed the head of the father of all lies when He was nailed to the cross. He went to that cross carrying all of your sin, your diseases, your infirmities, all your guilt, all your shame, all your despair, all your sorrows, and all your burdens. He carried all the wages of your sin and He died, putting it all to death, so that none of it could have any power or hold on you.

Yes, He died, but He didn't stay dead. The 3rd day, He rose again, never to die again. And, His resurrection is YOUR resurrection, Dear Child of God. On that great day that Jesus comes again in all His glory, His voice will call your mortal flesh and bone from the grave, and He will "transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body" (Ph 3:21). That means you will rise from the grave with a body free from illness, free from disease. And, there will be no more crying, no suffering, no sorrow anymore.

You live in that hope and certainty every day because you have been baptized into Christ. Paul says in the 6th chapter of Romans, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into His death?...For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a RESURRECTION like His" (Ro 6:3,5).

Living in trust and hope, we walk by faith, faith in the sure and certain promises of God, "There remains a Sabbath REST for the people of God" (He 4:9). "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are

the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Blessed indeed,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may REST from the labors, for their deeds follow them’” (Rev 14:13)!

Yes, the REST of heaven awaits us on that glorious day Jesus comes to us take us to Himself there. But even today, this very hour, Jesus is with us, at work in us, giving us REST from our labors and burdens. The Bible says it this way, “Let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” – that is, here, His table -- “that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need,” – for here, He feeds us with His life-giving body and blood, giving us grace to help in our time of need (He 4:16). Yes indeed, the Good Shepherd’s rod and staff comfort us.

As long as I can remember, my mother has had a copy of the poem “Footprints” hanging on her bedroom wall. In fact, I don’t remember a time when it was not there. That poem teaches us the REST Jesus gives.

A man reflects on scenes from his life. As he walks on the beach with Jesus, He notices two sets of footprints in the sand. Then, he noticed at the lowest and saddest times of his life, there was only ONE set of footprints. When he asked Jesus about it, you know Jesus’ answer, don’t you? “It was then that I carried you.”

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