

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
First Sunday after Epiphany, January 13, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 421, 408:1-2, 409, 416, 412.

Lessons: Exodus 20:8-11, 2 Corinthians 4:8-18, Matthew 5:1-6.

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:28-30.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think that all of you would agree that nothing feels nicer and more comfortable than a rest in a comfortable bed after a long, hard, stressful day of work.

Today Jesus is talking on the Sabbath Day. The Sabbath was the weekly day of rest and sacred assembly. While the people were enjoying a physical “day of rest” as commanded in the Law of Moses, Jesus pointed them to a greater rest. He speaks of a rest for the soul and an eternal rest, which we can really begin to enjoy here on earth. Today we review

JESUS’ INVITATION TO COME AND FIND REST

- 1. Jesus promises rest for weary souls.**
- 2. Come and take his yoke upon you and learn from him.**

Jesus just said *“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.”* Now he invites *“little children”*, the weary and burdened, to receive rest, the real rest that the Sabbath day and all God’s Sabbath laws pointed forward to.

Do you think that the eternal, omnipotent God who created all things by his word was really tired by the seventh day? Scripture does not say that God was tired on that day but only that he rested. He later commanded this Sabbath Day for mankind. He did this so that mankind might have a physical rest after six days of hard labor, of working for his living, but the Sabbath Day was also pointing forward to the real, permanent, eternal rest mankind would need after a lifetime of sin and guilt.

The weary and burdened are the ones to whom Jesus chooses to reveal the Father. These are the same people Jesus has described in our Gospel lesson as the poor in spirit, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. These are the people who acknowledge their sinfulness and realize that sin is a burden too heavy for them to bear, that this load will drag them down to hell if they must bear it by themselves. They are the ones to whom Jesus promises rest.

And this rest is his gift. A gift! Jesus says he will give them rest. They don’t have to earn it, as the Jews long ago supposed was the purpose of the Law. Do you remember the three uses or purposes of the Law? None of those point to the need to earn by ourselves, for ourselves the promises God offers.

The law serves as a curb to prevent to some degree the open, coarse outbreaks of sin in the world. People should be afraid to break God’s laws because they will be punished.

The Law serves as a mirror to show us our sinfulness. If anyone thinks he or she can obey God’s laws well enough to earn eternal life they are sorely mistaken. We are all sinners in deeds, in words, and in thoughts.

And for believers in Christ, the law serves as a guide, a straightedge, a pattern of what God wants us to do. The believer wants to run in the path of God’s commands out of love and appreciation for all that God has done for us. Trying to obey God’s law does not earn us – or anyone – rest. Jesus’ rest is a gift.

Jesus says *“come”*. We have here a very personal invitation from Christ to receive rest from the burdens of sin and its consequences. This is his greatest desire.

Everyone is invited. There is no restriction, except those who labor and are heavy laden, and isn't this everyone? However, it is easy to imagine unbelieving people in the world who seemingly aren't burdened by their sins. If someone has no consciousness of sins, if someone has no sense of right and wrong or imagines himself to not be subject to any laws except what he puts on himself, such a one might have no feeling of being burdened by sin. We're also thinking of someone who says or even thinks "that rule, that law, doesn't apply to me!"

The soul must recognize the real reason for its hard labor, its heavy burdens, its anxious cares. It is sin which makes man a slave. It is sin which can crush and oppress the soul.

Jesus must transform the person who feels burdened by the adversities of this world, by its sorrows and regrets, and who sighs for relief, into someone who realizes that sin is his greatest affliction.

We must look within ourselves, realizing that within us, each of us, is the real reason for such tiredness. With David we must admit that ***"There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me."*** Psalm 38:3-4 (KJV)

Trying to obey the law will only drive us further away from God. The burdens of our sins on our consciences and the condemnation of the Law make us truly weighed down.

And Jesus will take our burden of guilt and cast it down into the bottomless ocean of unconditional forgiveness. Only when one accepts and believes that will the soul find peace and real rest. Then we realize that the many reverses with which life abounds cannot interrupt the rest of the soul, and that Jesus has not overstated the truth.

Jesus says ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened."*** Remember that this invitation is extended to all mankind. Scripture makes that clear. For example, in First Timothy we read about ***"God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*** 1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV) So here Jesus extends a gentle, all-encompassing invitation to everyone burdened by sin to come to him and there is no human who has no sin.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for 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."

But doesn't this invitation sort of present a contradiction to our human, fleshly minds? Jesus talks about rest, but then he invites us take his "yoke" on him. Doesn't "yoke" suggest a burden, and labor?

Aha! But look at the yoke! It is to share the yoke of Jesus.

From one point of view – the flesh – this may be a heavy, intolerable, crushing burden. The flesh is reluctant to yield to the Spirit. But the yoke of Jesus is easy and light because it gives us true peace of heart. Nothing further is required. God works this in us! Jesus demands nothing more than what he will give; and it is his yoke that he is inviting us to take on.

Let's talk about a yoke and the yoke of Christ. A yoke is something – such as a heavy bar or frame put on the shoulders of a pair of animals such as oxen, with bows for the head to poke through. It is something that we remember from pioneer days that would connect two oxen together so that they could pull together. It shares the burden of pulling the wagon or plow. Instead of having just one creature do all the work, one relies on the other. One animal does not bear the entire burden alone. It is shared.

And so it is when we take the yoke of Christ. He bore, he carried all our sins on the cross. And lest we think that we are sharing the burden of earning our salvation, we must remember that ***"it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."*** Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

What is happening is that Christ invites us to take his yoke so that he shares the burden of our daily lives. When we take Christ's yoke on us and share our burdens with him, we learn of him. Think of any situations in which you work together with someone for a time. You tend to learn about that person. So it is when we share Christ's yoke. We learn of him from his word, the Bible, Jesus' written word. This is the way we must learn of him.

We must learn of him to realize all that he does and is doing for us.

Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. We have opportunity to hear of his humility again especially in the Lenten season as we hear again how he humbled himself even unto death, death on the cross.

From his Word, the Bible, is how we learn of Jesus.

The yoke Jesus asks us to take upon ourselves might be defined as the whole Christian life and hope. Once we have assumed that yoke, God's commandments are no longer a heavy burden that weigh us down and destroy us. Instead, they are expressions of God's will in which we delight, for we look for ways to express our thanks to God for the blessings of his grace, using the Law as our guide. Crosses we are called upon to bear on account of our loyalty to our Savior are faith-strengthening experiences, for they help us understand what Christ endured for us, and we have our Lord's promise that he will give us the strength to endure them and that he will make them channels for all kinds of blessings. The more faithfully we follow Christ, the easier his yoke and the lighter his burden becomes.

Jesus' burden is different than the burden of the Law. The Law becomes a guide we want to follow, as the Psalmist joyfully shouts: ***"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free."*** Psalm 119:32 (NIV)

The yoke of Christ easy and his burden is light, for he does not only remove the ceremonial law and human rules; but also the entire law, its curse, sin, death, and all that the law may impose on us. All of this Christ takes away and gives me the Spirit, in whom I cheerfully and willingly live. The yoke is easy and useful because he helps us to bear it. When it is too heavy, he places himself with us beneath the burden.

Submit in obedience to Jesus Christ in faith, submit in obedience to the saving Word of the Gospel, and give our all to him as his possession. We must humble ourselves. Remember Jesus' words about the tax collector who went into the temple to pray: ***"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."*** Luke 18:14 (KJV)

How humbly and meekly he gave himself for us! We must humble ourselves and learn to be meek and lowly as did Jesus. We must surrender ourselves to him, accept his salvation, trusting in his free, unmerited grace, and then, in all our way of life, as the followers of Jesus, bear our cross, enduring our afflictions, which are the burdens he lays upon his own beloved.

For love, everything is easy. And the yoke of Christ is cushioned with love. This burden gives true peace of heart, and there is nothing further required.

Instead of the load of sin, which is bound to drag us down to everlasting damnation, Christ will supply another, far different burden, one which is really a privilege. For it is his yoke, the yoke of the cross, which the Christians must bear in this world, as his followers. His example will be a constant reminder that we must learn in all things, in the midst of the sorrows and tribulations of the world, to follow his meekness and lowliness, which was a genuine meekness of the heart. There is nothing grievous and oppressive about it, because, in the final analysis, he bears both us and our burdens in love. He gives rest unto our souls. Paul asks ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Romans 8:35, 37-39 (NIV)

Far from separating us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, the tribulations of this present life, the crosses which we bear for the sake of our Lord, bind us more closely to him. Scripture assures us: ***"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."*** Hebrews 4:9-10 (NIV) We have eternal rest and rest even here on earth, hearing the blessed assurance "your sins are forgiven." May we always turn to Christ for rest and then receive from him true rest for our souls. Amen.