

5th Sunday After Pentecost 9th July 2017.

Matthew 11:25-30.

HYMNS:119, 306, 308, 346, 285, 411.

INTROIT: Psalm 145:1-14.

P I shall exalt You, my God, the King. I shall bless Your name for ever and ever.

C **Every day I shall bless You, and I shall praise Your name for ever and ever.**

P Great is the LORD, and to be highly praised! His greatness is unsearchable.

C **One generation will praise what You have done to the next, and they will proclaim Your mighty deeds.**

P Let me meditate on the glorious grandeur of Your majesty, and on the wonderful things that You have done!

C **People will talk about the power of Your awesome deeds, and I shall declare Your greatness.**

P They will pour forth the fame of Your great goodness, and they will shout for joy about Your righteousness.

C **The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to become angry and great in mercy.**

P The LORD is good to all. His compassion is over all that He has made.

C **All whom You have made will praise You, O LORD. Your devout people will bless You.**

P They will talk about the glory of Your Kingdom and speak about Your power.

C **In order to make known to the descendants of Adam the mighty things that He has done, and the glorious grandeur of His kingdom.**

P Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

C **The LORD is faithful in all His works, and gracious in all His deeds.**

All **The LORD supports all those who are falling. He raises up all who are bowed down.**

COLLECT: Gracious God, heavenly Father, Your mercy attends us all our days. Be our strength and support amid the wearisome changes of this world, and at life's end grant us Your promised rest and the full joys of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

READINGS

Old Testament: Zechariah 9:9-12.

Epistle: Romans 7:14-25a.

Gospel: Matthew 11:25-30.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

The text for our sermon for this morning is written in the book of Matthew 11:25-30 which was our Gospel reading before.

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from wise and intelligent people and have revealed them to infants. **26** Yes, Father, I praise You that this is how You have graciously wanted it to be. **27** All things have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.

28 "Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest!

29 Take My yoke on you and learn from Me! For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Peace be with you.

I cannot think of a more gracious invitation than the one we hear in today's Gospel. Jesus **declared**, **"Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest!**" Here Jesus is not talking about working hard physically. Instead, He is talking about the hard work we make of carrying our sins ... the labour of attempting to earn our own salvation from God. He's talking about the labour that the Apostle Paul describes in today's Epistle. **"For I do not understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want to do, but I do what I hate"** Paul mourns his failure ... that no matter how hard he works, he cannot be good enough for God.

It's the natural, the false, sinful religion of man to try and be good enough to earn God's favour. It's also a very hard life, false gods are not forgiving, they're not merciful. Instead they're harsh task masters who desire the constant labour of self-justification.

Down through the ages people have tortured and sacrificed themselves and their children in order to gain the favour of their gods. Consider the prophets of Baal in their dogfight with Elijah. **"They shouted louder and slashed themselves, as they usually did, with swords and long spears, until blood gushed out on them. In the afternoon they raved on until the time for the evening sacrifice. However, there was no sound. No one answered, and no one paid attention."** [1kings 18 :28,29.] You see it was part of their worship to cut themselves and to rant and rave in order to get the attention of the false god they worshipped. The Aztecs were famous for cutting the hearts out of living human beings as a sacrifice to make themselves right with the gods they worshipped. Virgin sacrifice is another way to earn the favour of certain gods. Today we have Allah who tells you to sacrifice your son in jihad in order to earn celestial paradise. It's all very hideous, cruel, and obscene.

Physical sacrifice is not the only example of sacrifice given to false religions. Some religions in America require their members to make copies of all their tax forms and give them to the church. The church then compares the giving record of the member to the income reported to the IRS and will kick the member out if they do not give a certain percentage of that income. Some false religions do not allow their followers to celebrate birthdays or Christmas or any other holiday. Some religions do not allow blood transfusions. The list goes on and on.

What do all these acts of sacrifice and torture tell us about humanity? It tells us that it's natural for humanity to believe that there's something or someone out there that's way bigger than we are, And **"that"** someone or something is very powerful and very angry. We need to do something to satisfy that someone or something so that he, she, or it, Isn't angry with us, but is favourably disposed toward us instead. This is the hard labour of all false religions.

The nasty truth about this hard labour is that it is never good enough. No matter how hard you work, things still go wrong. Tragedies still happen. The crops still fail. Plagues still strike. People get sick. People get injured. People die. Nothing is ever good enough. Nevertheless, the followers of false religions redouble their efforts when tragedy strikes. They try harder. Their labours, their hard works are never over. Either that, or they just give up in despair and hopelessness.

God's Word gives us an entirely different worldview. It tells of the true God who created a world where work was a joy. Work was fulfilling. It was satisfying. It was never frustrating. Adam and Eve could have gone to sleep at the end of the day knowing that their work was pleasing in God's sight.

As you know that all changed when Adam and Eve sinned. Work became a burden. Today, even those who really enjoy their work have days of frustration. Many people think of work as a necessary evil ... something we do just so we can put food on the table, clothes on the back, and a roof over the head. It is something to avoid if possible. When we go to sleep at the end of the day, we know that our work can never be pleasing in God's sight. Nothing we think, say, or do can ever make us right with God.

Then Jesus comes with a new teaching. **"Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest!**" This is unlike any other religion in the world. Here is a religion where God tells us to lay down our burden of self-justification. Here is God telling us to rest. Here is Jesus telling us that He will take the heavy burden. He will take the hard labour of Salvation unto Himself. He will take our hard yoke and make it easy. He will take our heavy burden and make it light.

The reason that Jesus can say this is that He is the Son of God who entered history in order to save us from our own sin. While we can do nothing to please God, everything that Jesus does is pleasing to God. While we cannot endure the punishment that will satisfy God's justice, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross has totally satisfied God's justice for you and me. Jesus is the one who takes our hard yoke on Himself and gives us the easy yoke of forgiveness in its place. He is the one who took up our heavy burden of sin and replaced it with the light burden of His righteousness. He has taken the labour and burden of false belief and replaced it with the **rest** of true faith.

Jesus has done all the work that makes us right with God. The blessings of that work become available to us when the Holy Spirit works faith in us. The Holy Spirit establishes the faith that receives the gifts of God – forgiveness, life, salvation. At the same time, the Holy Spirit creates a new being in us – a holy child of God. We now have the easy yoke of Christ's forgiveness and the light burden of His righteousness.

The forces of evil hate Christ's easy yoke and light burden. They will tempt us to return to the life that struggles to earn God's favour. Our old sinful nature is still around. There is the holy child of God striving for righteousness and holiness, and there is the old sinful nature constantly trying to turn us back to the broad road that leads to spiritual destruction. We become battle fields and the temptation is for us to try to do the fighting.

Nevertheless, Jesus continuously invites us, **“Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden; and I shall give you rest!** He says, “I am your champion. I have already won the war. The holy, sinless life that Jesus led – His innocent suffering and death – His resurrection and the ascension – all these, Jesus did for us! Through His holy life and sinless death, He won forgiveness for us. With that forgiveness comes life and salvation. He has taken all our sin – all our guilt to the cross, including those sins we commit even after we are a child of God.

When Martin Luther nailed the ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, the first theses stated that the life of the Christian is one of continual repentance. We mourn the fact that, even as God's children, we daily sin much. At the same time we rejoice in the free, abundant and overwhelming forgiveness that we have in Jesus Christ.

The life of the Christian is a battle, but we have the champion who has defeated all our foes, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

3rd Hymn: 308.

Prayer of the Church 5th Sunday after Pentecost 9 July 2017

P Let us pray to the Lord, who hears our cry and saves us.

Brief silence

P Our God and King, we bless and extol Your name forever and ever. If it were not for You, nothing good would dwell in us. We thank You for the baptismal waters that washed us clean and recreated us to be Your people. Help us always to live lives in service to You and in service to our neighbour.... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Lord of heaven and earth, You have hidden things from the wise and understanding. Give to Your Church pastors and other workers who will faithfully proclaim the hidden things and make them known to us and our children. May Your Word continue to flourish in our congregations, and may we be able to grow in faith and knowledge. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. We pray that You would send workers into the harvest. Receive our thanks for the students who are completing their seminary training in the ULMA, and here in the AELC, to be ordained and installed where You will place them. May they remain ever faithful to You and be a blessing to those they serve. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Lord God, be with all who are weary and heavy laden by the trials and tribulations of this life. Give comfort to [*and*] all who suffer illness. Console them with the knowledge that Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light, and that in You they will find rest for their souls. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P You have delivered us from this body of death and given us the hope of eternal life. Keep us ever mindful of Your promises during our earthly pilgrimage where evil is close at hand and our desire to do good does not match our ability. Allow us to look forward with faith to the time when You will bring us fully into Your everlasting Kingdom, where we will serve You in both mind and flesh. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Once again, we come to Your table to receive the body and blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ, given and shed for us. May we receive it rightly in faith for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our love for one another. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C Amen.

4th Hymn: 346.