

Sermon – Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
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“You That Are Weary”

Sisters and brothers, friends in Christ, grace be unto you and peace this day, in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. How are you? I have had so many conversations that begin with this question. How are you? Over the past few months, however, many people have responded: “Do you really want to know?” I’ve said it a few times, too. Under normal circumstances, even when we’re not doing well, we can manage a smile and some polite conversation. But recently we haven’t been doing that well, and it’s hard to pretend otherwise. How are you? Well, I’ll tell you how I am. I’m tired. And not just because I spent most of the Fourth of July assembling furniture from IKEA, although that didn’t help. I’m so tired that I’m not even going to joke about being tired of not having baseball to watch or an associate pastor with whom to work. I’m tired of this pandemic, of making plans to move forward and fearing that we’re about to be thrown backward. I’m tired of not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, of not knowing how long the coronavirus will stalk us. I’m tired of the rhetoric that is endemic to a presidential election year. I’m tired of the fractious divisions in our country, wearied by our inability to move forward faster toward equity and equality for people of color. And I imagine that people of color are thinking right now: “You think you’re tired out by this? We’ve been walking this road for centuries.” I’m tired of not being able to solve these problems, and I doubt I’m the only one. The burdens are heavy, and we are weary.
2. The good news today is that the gospel is good news for tired people. *Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest,*

Jesus says. These words of comfort and hope hit us with the weight of a pillow at the end of a long journey. *Come to me*, Jesus says, I am the One you've been looking for. And there he is, right in front of our eyes, right where he's always been, if only we had eyes to see. But his generation, like our generation, is prone to foolishness. They saw John the Baptist and called him a demon. They saw Jesus and called him a sinner due to the company he kept. Jesus knows they can't see him, so he, the Word of God, speaks to them: *Come to me. I will give you rest.*

3. Like that generation, we are tired. Like that generation, our exhaustion is largely induced by our own foolishness. While I am not naïve enough to imagine that there are not truly bad people out there, most of the people I know don't particularly want to live in a broken, divided world. On this weekend when we commemorate the birth of our nation, I think most of us truly want life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to be available equally to all people. We know that in spite of these words, our nation was founded upon inequality, and we want to rectify this situation. We're tired of injustice and inequality, tired of racism. And yet, here we still are. Why? Well, taking the Apostle Paul as our guide, it is not enough to want to make things better. Even our best efforts get twisted and turned around. On our own, we are not capable of solving the problems in the world *around* us because there is something fundamentally wrong *within* us. As Paul writes, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." And, "when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand." We are wretched, indeed. It's not that we don't want to make the world a better place; it's that we are so marred by sin that we can't do it. That may seem bleak but look around. As a colleague recently said to me, bemoaning her seminary students who find sin to be an outdated notion, "But sin explains so much!" We are sinners in need of forgiveness, strivers in need of rest. This, oddly, is the equality in which new life begins. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. This is not to say that all sin is equal. Reality tells us that there are oppressors and those who have been

oppressed. Still, we are all sinners, all caught up in a world that is broken and in need of mending; a world that is dead and cries out for resurrection.

4. You may recall the film *A Beautiful Mind*, which tells the story of John Nash, the brilliant mathematician who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia. At one point, Nash tells his psychiatrist that he will use his analytic skills to cure his own illness. The doctor replies, "You can't reason your way out of this, because your mind is where the problem is in the first place." In just this way, Paul asserts, we cannot heal ourselves. We can neither live out our good intentions nor heal our fractured relationship with God. We need someone else to do these things for us. We need God, specifically the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ.
5. The rest Jesus offers is first manifested in the forgiveness of sin, given in grace by God's even to those who deserve it the least. Yes, you've gotten it wrong. And in trying to fix it, you've made it worse. The whole thing is a ball of yarn never to be untangled. So stop trying for a minute. Stop. *Come to me and rest*. Listen to what Jesus says: Bring me your burdens. Rest. Take my yoke and learn from me. Rest. Now, take up my burden. The rest for weary souls of which Jesus speaks is not idleness. It's not the doing of nothing. Instead, it is admitting that our efforts and exertions are not only getting us nowhere; they're exhausting us and making things worse. Stop. Put your burdens down and pick up Jesus' burden. In his crucifixion, he's already done the heavy lifting. On the other side of sin and death, it's light work. Oh, it's still work. There's no shortage of that. We have a pandemic to face and centuries of oppression and injustice to overcome. It won't happen overnight. The only way we have a shot at it is if we stop trying so hard on our own and trust the easy hand of Jesus to lead the way.
6. Maybe we thought things would be better by now. I imagine that's how the exiles felt after they returned from Babylon. But then the Persians came

along and they were under foreign rule once more. Zechariah cried out: "Rejoice greatly! Your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." We hear the echoes of the humble King who would enter Jerusalem to save us. "Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope." Prisoners of hope. You who were mastered by forces without and by sin within, you are now free. The king who rode a donkey into Jerusalem is also the Lamb who was slain to free you from yourself. You now live on the other side of death, carrying burdens that are real yet light as air. Rest now in Jesus, friends. He will care for your souls. In Christ and for his sake, get to work. The world's woes won't solve themselves, and on our own neither will we. As we wait for the Kingdom to come in which all will be made right, we work, well rested, for that Kingdom to come today. The yoke of Christ rests lightly upon you, and he will show the way. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.