

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

Today's Gospel reading contains some of the most familiar words, some of the most relatable words, and some of the most needed words of Scripture.

- I refer to verses 28 and 30 of Matthew chapter 11, read to you a few moments ago.
- Jesus says, Jesus invites, "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."

I suspect each of us, at least at one time or another need these verses.

- Maybe you need them all the time.
- Perhaps you need them today more than ever.
- Labored and heavy laden and in need of rest.

Okay, that invitation sound good but how do we really get that rest?

- And even before that, sometimes I'm a real mess.
- Is God really in control?
- Can He give me that rest?
- From my vantage point, more times than not, things seem to be spinning out of control.

If you look at our Gospel reading as a whole.....the first part here often gets ignored.

- But it answers the question if God is in control and if He can really fulfill His invitation and offer that He gives to us today.

Perhaps the first part of our Gospel reading is often ignored because it is a little hard to understand.

- Perhaps because we need so desperately that rest that we quickly jump to the second part and forget the first part.

I refer now to the first verse of our Gospel reading.

- Jesus declared, "I thank You Father, Lord of heaven and earth that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will."

What does that mean?

- What is Jesus saying?
- Hidden these things from some? I thought salvation was for all.
- And Jesus even sounds joyful that the Father is doing these things.

Well, I put forth to you today that these 2 passages or sections do go together.

- The first speaks to and supports that Jesus can give to us the second part.....that precious invitation and offering that Jesus gives to us today.

But first things first.

- Is God even in a position to give us rest?
- The first part of Scripture gives us a clear answer to this.

The Father is in charge.

- Unrepentant sinners have not thwarted His plan.
- Hear again the last words of this first portion of Scripture that I just read to you.
- “Yes, Father, for such is Your gracious will.”

Bruce Larson had an unusual way of convincing people to turn their lives over to Jesus Christ.

- When he was working in New York City, he would walk a man or woman downtown to the front of the RCA building on Fifth Avenue.
- In front of the building there is a gigantic statue of a massively proportioned, magnificently muscled Atlas, the world resting on his shoulders.
- As powerfully built as he is, he is straining under the weight, barely able to stand.

Larson would say, “Now that’s one way to live, trying to carry the world on your shoulders. But now come across the street with me.”

- Across the street is St. Patrick’s Cathedral.
- There behind the altar is a little shrine of the boy Jesus.
- He appears to be no more than 8 or 9 years old.

As little and frail as He appears, He is holding the world in one hand!

- Then Larson would say, “We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can say, I give up Lord, here’s my life. I give you my world, the whole world.”

So how do we get that rest that Jesus offers?

- I put forth that the question is answered for us in the words of the first portion of what Jesus has to say to us today.
- The Father has hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children

Remember from last week if you were able to be with us that the little children are Christ's disciples.

- The followers of Christ.....you and me.
- The little children are the ones that are utterly dependent on Jesus.

Conversely, the wise and understanding are those that depend on themselves.

- They think they are so intelligent.....they have it all figured out....in worldly ways.
- And they think they have to handle things themselves. And even that they can handle things themselves.
- And the truth is no one can do any of this and if he or she thinks they can, they are deceiving themselves.

God has arranged it so that nothing should be required of us.

- Only trust in Him.
- If high intellectual attainments on our part were required, that would automatically shut out all who have no such attainments.
- If we had to bring something, grace would be only partial and not complete on God's part.
- The Father had to proceed as He did.
- And Jesus is rejoicing that the Father has put the plan in place that it does not at all depend on us.

How do we get that rest?

- Only in Jesus.
- Not the wisdom and understanding and efforts of men.....but only in Jesus.
- One hundred percent in Jesus. No person can claim independence or self-sufficiency of any kind.

Notice in Jesus' invitation to us today....there is no action, nothing for us to take on, on our own part.

- When Jesus says, "Take My yoke upon you".....
- That consists of learning what Jesus is like.

- It is nothing more than to become a disciple of Jesus, as in Jesus' own words, "Learn from Me."
- What we need to learn from Jesus is that He is gentle and humble in heart.

Are you heavy burdened?

- Of course you are.
- All people of all times and places will be subject to the heavy burdens of sin.
- Life in a fallen creation is a hard life.

Pastor Gil Brandt, a pastor in Oregon who I've referred to before, who puts out a weekly blog, captures the weariness and burdens of life.

- He has 7 categories and he captures it this way.

First, there is the sheer weariness of life.

- The treadmill of life you are on.
- It doesn't ever seem to slow down or stop. Even though you need it to.
- Rev. Brandt says you work hard to enjoy fun....but when you take the time for fun, you are too broke to afford them.

Next is the weariness of age.

- The aches and pains.
- The loss of independence.
- More and more doctor's visits.
- And you have the weariness of just not being able to do what you once did.

Then there is the burden of guilt.

- Relationships ended.
- Decisions made badly. Opportunities lost.
- And even the weariness of putting up the façade that everything is okay when it is not.

The fourth category is the burden of worry or cares.

- We know that worrying does no good but yet we worry.
- We have worries over many things.
- Rev. Brandt says, even the worries of your congregation....if it will continue to flourish.

The fifth category relates to the worries or cares.....anxiety.

- To illustrate this one, let me ask you a question.
- What are you even thinking about when Jesus invites you to lay down your burdens.
- Most often, our worries are over things that we have no control.

The sixth category is personal burdens.

- And Rev. Brandt says this is most often around our children.
- You gnaw at the past.
- What did we do wrong?
- A marriage that went bad. Out of the church. Out of work.
- Drugs and alcohol usage.
- These all can be huge burdens in people's lives.

And the last one is simply physical exhaustion.

- You're tired. You're worn out.
- You've fought the fight.
- The race is near the end....you're ready to cross the finish line.

Jesus' invitation today goes out to each of us.

- He says, come unto Me all who are laboring and heavy burdened.
- Seemingly contradictory, taking the yoke of Jesus, lightens the burden of life and eternity.

One day a father decided to take his son to play at the local park.

- The boy quickly gravitated to the sandbox and found himself mesmerized by it.
- After a short time he began digging around to see what treasures might reveal themselves to him.

As his hands plunged under the sand he discovered something rather large, and having pushed enough of the sand away, realized it was a large rock.

- Instantly he knew he needed to move that rock, no matter how big it was.
- The rock was the obstacle to his dreams of a sandbox clear of all extraneous matter.

So, the boy tried as hard as he could to move the rock.

- He pushed and pushed and pushed, and finally he was able to get it to the edge of the sandbox.
- But the next step would be the hardest.
- How could he get it over the edge?

Again, the boy pushed and pushed until his energy was completely fried.

- The rock's stuckness matched the boy's feelings of the situation.
- Eventually he started to sob.

The boy's father watched all this, and just when the meltdown began, the father went over to his son, and began to comfort the overtaxed, dejected son.

- "Why didn't you use all the strength available to you to move the rock?" the father asked.
- The boy was confused, "I did daddy, it's just too heavy."
- "My son," you didn't. You didn't ask me to help.
- And at that, the father lifted the rock with a single hand and tossed it out of the sandbox,

You've probably heard the saying before, "You can't ride on someone's coattails."

- That actually came from the 1600's.
- An old fashioned type of jacket had coattails that extended to the ground,
- And if someone sat on the coattail they would have a free ride.
- Or, the intentions of the saying is that you can't have success by association with another.

Well, with Jesus you can.

- "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding." It is not about us.
- "But You have revealed them to little children." That is, trust in Jesus as a little child.
- Be His disciple, a follower of Him.
- And He will carry the burden.

Today, we are offered a free ride.

- Today, Jesus' words offer true rest for all who are laboring and heavy burdened.
- And He can do it.
- Amen.

And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.