

July 5, 2026

Matthew 11:25-30

**“The Rest that Only Jesus Can Give!”**

Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 1522, after years of deep spiritual struggle, Martin Luther described what it felt like to try to make himself right with God. He was constantly trying to fix himself - to correct his sins, improve his heart, and make himself acceptable through prayer, fasting, confession, and discipline. Yet the harder he worked, the heavier the burden became. He later said it was like climbing a ladder to heaven that never reached the top. Every step only reminded him how far he still had to go and how much more needed fixing. Then, through the Gospel, everything changed. He came to see that righteousness was not something he achieved but something God gave through Jesus. What he had been searching for all along was not a better version of himself, but a Savior. That is exactly the truth Jesus speaks into our lives in Matthew 11.

Jesus begins with prayer: "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." These words surprise us. We usually assume that the wise, the capable, and the spiritually serious are the ones who understand God best. But Jesus says the opposite. The truth of salvation is hidden from those who trust in their own wisdom, and revealed to those who come like children. Why is that? Because the Gospel cannot be earned, reasoned out, or mastered by human effort. It must be given. It must be revealed. Human pride resists this. We want something we can contribute. We want a system that allows us to say, "I have done enough." But the Gospel removes that possibility entirely. It tells us that we cannot save ourselves, that we cannot contribute anything, and that we must simply receive what God gives. That offends our nature. But children receive. Children trust. Children depend. That is what faith looks like.

Jesus then says that no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son reveals him. This is critical. We do not climb up to God through our thoughts or efforts. God comes to us through Christ. If you want to know who God is - how he feels about you, how he deals with sinners - you must look to Jesus. Not to your own feelings, not to your circumstances, not to speculation, but to Christ himself. He is the full revelation of God's heart toward you.

Then comes the invitation that stands at the center of this text: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This invitation is not vague. It is deeply personal and direct. But it is also specific. It is addressed to those who are weary and burdened. In Jesus' day, people were crushed under the weight of the law, especially as it had been turned into a complex system of religious requirements. But the burden is not just religious. It is the weight every person carries - the burden of guilt, the pressure to be enough, the fear that we are not, the constant striving to fix ourselves. Even today, people are exhausted. We carry expectations, pressures, and quiet anxieties that we can never quite satisfy. We try to improve ourselves, distract ourselves, or justify ourselves, but the burden remains. Because at the root of it all is the deep assumption that if something is wrong - especially with us - it must be our job to fix it. And so we keep on trying.

And here is the crucial point: Jesus does not say, "Fix yourself, then come." He says, "Come." Come while you are weary. Come while you are burdened. Come as you are. That is the Gospel. And then he promises, "I will give you rest." Not that you will find rest by trying harder, but that he himself will give

it. Not a better method for fixing yourself, but rest from the need to fix yourself at all. This rest is not just physical relief. It is rest for the soul. It is the end of striving to justify yourself before God, because Jesus has already justified you. It is the peace of knowing that your sins are forgiven, that your standing before God is secure, and that Christ has done everything necessary for your salvation. This is the rest Luther finally discovered - the rest of a conscience that no longer looks inward at itself, but outward to Christ. In him, your burden has already been carried. Your sin has already been paid for. His righteousness is given to you as a gift.

But then Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart." At first, this sounds surprising. First rest, and now a yoke? But here is where we must understand what kind of yoke this is. The yoke of the law says, "Do this and live," and it is never done. It demands perfect obedience and gives nothing but accusation. That is why it becomes such a crushing burden. But Jesus' yoke is entirely different. It does not demand that you fix yourself in order to become righteous. Instead, it gives righteousness to you as a gift. It says, "Believe this: it is already done." Christ has fulfilled the law in your place. Christ has borne your sin. Christ has carried the full weight of God's judgment. So when he says, "Take my yoke," He is not placing a burden on you that you must carry to earn salvation. He is inviting you to receive what he has already accomplished.

This is why his yoke is easy. It is easy not because there is no struggle in the Christian life, but because the burden of salvation is no longer on you. You are no longer trying to fix yourself or prove yourself before God. That burden has been lifted and placed entirely on Christ. And this is why his burden is light. The Christian life still includes suffering, temptation, and hardship. But now those burdens are no longer signs of God's condemnation. They are carried in Christ, under his grace, and with his presence. He meets the weary not with more demand, but with mercy. What was once crushing becomes bearable because faith knows that Jesus has already overcome everything.

Jesus promises, "You will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Without Christ, even small burdens feel overwhelming because the conscience is troubled. But with Christ, even heavy burdens become light, because the conscience is finally at peace.

So the question comes to each of us: where do you go with your burden? Do you try harder, trying again to fix what feels wrong? Do you hide it? Do you distract yourself? Or do you come to Christ? His invitation still stands: "Come to me." Not once, but again and again. When the law accuses you, come to Christ. When your conscience is heavy, come to Christ. When you are worn down, come to Christ. The rest he gives is real, present, and certain.

Here one may think of the Israelites standing at the edge of the Red Sea in Exodus 14. Behind them is Pharaoh's army, closing in fast. In front of them is the sea. There is no escape. No strategy. No strength is left. And the people panic, because they believe everything depends on them. They cry out in fear, as if they must fix this, as if they must somehow survive by their own effort. But into that moment comes the Word of the Lord through Moses: "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

That is one of the hardest words for us to hear. Be still? Do nothing? When everything feels like it depends on us? But that is exactly the point. Their deliverance did not depend on their strength, their plan, or their ability to act. It depended entirely on the Lord. And then God does what they could never do. He opens the sea. He makes a way where there was no way. He carries them through.

That is what Christ is saying to you. You are not saved because you held everything together. You are not rescued because you proved yourself. You are saved because the Lord has acted for you. And in Christ, he has done far more than open the sea. He has carried your sin, your guilt, and your death all the way to the cross.

So now he speaks to you with promise: “Come to me.” Not “carry more,” not “try harder,” not “fix yourself,” but come. And because he has already borne your greatest burden, he now gives you what you could never produce on your own - true rest for your soul!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott