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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9A)

July 9, 2017

Text: Matthew 11:25–30

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today's gospel reading from Matthew 11 comes at a providential opportune time. The last couple of Sundays have been challenging. Two weeks ago, it was the commemoration of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. We were reminded of the boldness and courage that our Lutheran forefathers possessed as they confessed the gospel in all its true and beauty in a hostile and tense situation. We heard again the words of Jesus from Matthew 10:32–33, “³²So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” We 21st century Christians are called to confess boldly and courageously our faith in Jesus before the world. And then last week, we were challenged with our Lord's teaching that to be His disciples is to love Him more than family, friends, even life itself, “³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37–38). To be a Christian is to enter into a spiritual battle in which the eternity is at stake.

Why is this week providential? Jesus invites us to find rest and comfort in Him. Hear again Matthew 11:28–30, “²⁸Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” It's easy to become burdened and heavy laden as we live in this fallen world. Pain, sorrow, spiritual anxiety, fears, failures, sins, persecution, you name it, they all wear on you. Life can be grind. Jesus invites us to come to Him. Saints of God, heed our Lord's invitation to find rest and comfort in Him.

I also find it providential that these promises of our Lord come at a very difficult time in His ministry. Matthew 11:1–24 describes these difficulties. To begin with, disciples of John the Baptist came to Jesus to ask Him if He's the Messiah. People are starting to question if Jesus really is the Messiah (11:1–19). And then Jesus speaks a word of judgment against the Galilean towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Jesus

had preached and performed many signs and wonders in these towns and yet they refuse to believe He's the long-anticipated Messiah. The hardness of heart is so intense in these cities that Jesus declares Sodom and Gomorrah would have already repented of their sins and turned to God in faith! Those two OT cities were infamous for being evil; their names are synonymous with wickedness.

If you were to read Matthew 11:1–24, you might think Jesus' ministry is failing. Whole geographic regions are rejecting Jesus. And even those who you'd think would be the strongest allies – the disciples of John the Baptist – are doubting Jesus.

And what does Jesus do in light of all this bad news? He gives thanks!! That's a surprise. Look at vs. 25–26, "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." Everything is apparently going wrong and Jesus gives thanks for it and even says it's God's gracious will.

In the midst of very trying times, Jesus thankfully declares that God the Father's good and gracious will is being done. The outward appearance of things may seem dreadful. But God's will is being accomplished. So Jesus gives thanks.

Wow! Is that not a challenging and, at the same time, encouraging teaching?! In spite of what we're experiencing at any given time in our lives, God's love for us remains true and unchanging. He is – He is – accomplishing His gracious will for each of us. That is why we can and should give thanks to our God in the mist of all things. The apostle Paul describes our Christian worship service in these very terms of giving thanks in all circumstances in Ephesians 5:19–20, "¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Giving thanks to the Father always and for everything in the name of Jesus. Christian worship is receiving all that God desires to give us in Christ Jesus with thanksgiving even when, and maybe most especially when, the experiences of day to day life are such a burden.

This spiritual wisdom and refreshing is available to all. But so often, it remains hidden. Look again at vs. 25. Jesus gives thanks that God the Father has "hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children." Some hear and believe. Others hear and disbelieve. The "wise and understanding" in this case are people who see themselves as self-sufficient; they can carry their burdens

quite well, thank you very much. They don't need, so they think, a Savior like Jesus, one who saves people, sinners and all, out of sheer grace without any merit or worthiness in the person.

Jesus dealt with these people all the time during His earthly ministry. "The wise and understanding" scoffed at Jesus for eating with sinners, for allowing prostitutes and lepers to touch Him, for receiving notorious, evil people as children of God. God's grace, love, and mercy were hidden from them.

"Little children", however, received the ministry of the Lord Jesus. These are the people, young and old alike, who followed Jesus and trusted Him with everything, their very bodies and souls. They realized that they were totally dependent upon Christ. And God the Father revealed Himself to them in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus.

And that's why we cling to Christ all the more fervently. Look at vs. 27 (Jesus speaking), "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." This is a most remarkable Scripture verse.

The Father handed everything over to Jesus, His beloved Son. God's will and power and might are funneled through Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus is the focal point of God's work in creation. The Father gives Himself through His Son.

For some people, this exclusivity of the Christian gospel is too narrow, too restrictive. It almost sounds like God is arbitrary and unrealizable. But listen to what Jesus says in the next verses, "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" (vs. 28-30). God the Father works universally in people's lives through His Son, Jesus. God desires to eternal rest and victory to all people. In order to give these precious gifts, He gives His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And what does He expect us to bring to Him? Our good works, our righteousness and holiness, our pedigree of faith and faithfulness? No. We bring our burdens, our weary consciences, our sins, our shame, our questions and doubts, our fears; we bring it all to Him. Jesus invites us to place them upon His shoulders.

But notice this. Jesus doesn't simply take away our burdens. He puts something upon us in their place. "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" (vs. 29). We are yoked – connected – to Jesus. All that He is and all that He gives is ours. That's what God the Father desires to give to each and every one of us here today; more than that, to the entire world.

The "little children" hear this and rejoice with exceedingly great joy at the revelation of God's love in Christ. We must repent of any form of arrogance that says, we don't need such a Savior. Turn from any form of self-dependency lest we become the "wise and understanding" who miss out on God revealing Himself in Christ Jesus, lest we miss out on the Father's promised rest and joy.

Life in this world is a grind. Things happen that we can't fully understand or explain. There is real sorrow, real suffering in this world, in this town, in our homes. And Jesus says, "Come to me. I have already taken care of these burdens. I bore them on my cross so you need not carry them any further. Live in the freedom and joy of my resurrection. Find rest in me. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light. Come to me."

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.