

## **Matthew 11:25-30**

**At that time 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. 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. 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."**

Preaching is often a balancing act and it can be easy for any preacher to "bury the lead" in a sermon. It's easy to dive into the text or present wonderful illustrations or share challenging applications but neglect to emphasize the main point of the message. I don't want to do that today. I believe the message of this text and the implications that flow from it are too important. So, I want to sum up this text and its implications with one phrase that you will hear me say multiple times this morning and I've been praying that it's truth will resonate in our hearts long after we've left this building. The phrase is this: "It's Ok to not be Ok"

My goal this morning is two fold. The first thing I'm trusting God to do in our time together is to establish the truth of

the reality that it's Ok to not be Ok. We will look closely at Jesus' words recorded in Mt 11 to determine that Jesus invites us in, even when (or maybe especially when) we are not ok. It's important to see this directly in God's word so that you know that I'm not making this up. My second goal is to consider (at least some of) the implications of this truth. How does owning it affect our view of God, of Jesus and of ourselves? How do we relate within the body of Christ? How do we pray? And more.

Since our text this morning stands in the flow of a discourse Jesus is having with the people who have been following him around the Galilean countryside, it is important for us to know what has gone before. The chapter starts with an exchange between Jesus and some followers of John the Baptist. Jesus basic response is "Look at the prophecies in the Old Testament and look at me. What else would you expect from the Son of Man?" Then he compares the crowds to fickle children who ask for one thing but are then unhappy when they receive that thing. In turn they ask for exactly the opposite. Following this exchange he rebukes the Jewish cities where he has done a majority of his preaching and miracles. They have been blessed with the Old Testament scriptures plus the preaching and the miracles of Jesus. And yet they don't believe.

This is the very point our text takes an amazing turn. The progression so far has been downward: questioning, followed by fickleness, followed by out right rejection. Can there possibly be any hope for any one of us? The answer lays in Jesus' response to this impossible dilemma. He doesn't call down fire from heaven nor does he walk away

wringing his hands. Instead, he prays.

Jesus thanks his Father (our Father) that he has hidden the truth of the reality of the gospel from wise and learned people and he's given that insight to people who have the faith of little children. In Jesus' culture, as well as our own, this statement is upside down. Children, especially little children, don't have any authority. Doesn't might make right? Aren't the smartest people usually CEOs and presidents? Aren't the wisest ones those who shape culture and aspire to the Supreme Court? How then can Jesus say the Father has decided to reveal his truth, The Truth, to those with a child like faith? Interestingly, Jesus doesn't defend his statement. Instead, as he does so often in the book of Matthew, he simply appeals to the authority that God has given him.

In fact, Jesus' divinely given authority is the point in the first part of verse 27. This one idea should both fill us with awe and draw us in like a magnet. Jesus is not just an ordinary carpenter. He is not simply a good, moral teacher. He has been given all things by God our Father. Because of this Jesus is worthy of our worship. In addition, since he has been given all things, he is able to hear and respond to our deepest needs. We don't (we can't) bring him anything. We come empty. And that's ok.

Jesus' other point in this verse is less about his authority and more about his people. We are part of the all things that have been given to Jesus. And he is the one whom reveals the Father to us. Consider this: any wisdom you have, any insight you may possess, and faith you lean upon,

it all is a gracious gift of Jesus. It has been said we tremendously underestimate what Jesus does for us on a daily basis and simultaneously overestimate what we bring to the table.

This leads Jesus to offer his stunning invitation in v28. "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." In one sense, this is just a continuation of Jesus' flow of upside down thought. Not the wise, but the child like; not the self sufficient, but those dependent on Christ. And now it is not those who have it all together but those who are toiling, and struggling that Jesus invites to find rest in Him.

What's stunning, at least to me, is the imagery of exchange. We understand and accept the idea of exchange when it comes to our sins: Jesus bearing our sins on the cross while giving us his own righteousness in which we can stand before our Father. However, here we have that idea laid before us with our burdens and struggles. Jesus is inviting each of us to exchange the things that grip us, that weigh us and exchange them for rest and refreshment.

The two descriptive words here may help us get the idea Jesus is trying to communicate. The word "labor" conveys the intensity of fatigue, laboring to exhaustion. Picture a marathoner who has run in high humidity, against the wind and up hill. This is not "I carried a box of books up a flight of stairs and I'm winded." Rather, this is "I can barely stand, every muscle is screaming, my mind is in blind whirl, my emotions are all over the map and I simply want to quit." The other word is "heavy laden" This carries with it the idea

of improper over loading. Imagine a large pack loaded on your back that is too heavy for you and it unevenly packed so that you are constantly leaning to one side or another. Together we have the perfect storm for despair and disillusionment.

What's interesting, encouraging and freeing is that Jesus doesn't look at our weariness and say try harder or call us wimps for being fatigued. He is not like the coaches at the Olympics. They are very much into and concerned for their athlete's performance, yet powerless to affect the outcome of the event. Nor does he condemn us when we find ourselves in this state of exhaustion. Instead, he opens the floodgates of his mercy and invites everyone to come to him for rest. And the rest he offers is a rest that conveys both a break in the action but also a recharging and refreshing for the journey ahead.

Notice the rest and refuge that Jesus offers to his disciples is not completely unconditional. He is asking something of us in return. Now, I realize most of us are used a quid pro quo in our own personal relationships. A favor granted in expectation of a favor returned. But that's not how Jesus operates. As usual, Jesus' condition is paradoxical. He seeks out the weary and the burdened and offers them rest and a load that is light, which also fresh and nimbl. Instead of a task master, he offers to teach as one who is both gentle and humble.

And, there is one other item to point out. What Jesus is inviting us into is not simply physical rest or relief from our emotional loads. I think these are a part of what he is

getting at, but in verse 29 he makes it clear that the main emphasis is a rest for our souls. Along the same lines as Heb 4:9-10, Jesus is offering us rest from the exhausting work of trying to save our soul. And in this setting, the soul is the essence of who we are. Jesus is saying that we can have rest physically, emotionally and spiritually when we allow him to carry the load we could never carry.

So, here's the question that has been rolling around in my mind and pressing on my heart for the past several weeks as I've thought about the realities of this passage: What difference does it make? Just because we know a few more facts about Jesus and what he taught doesn't automatically mean that it will impact our lives. These truths and their implications need to sink from our heads to hearts. We need to own them and they need to own us.

*What follows are just a few of the implications of this text. Now I realize there are more implications than I have time to draw out this morning. However, if one occurs to you and you wish to share it with me, by all means do so. I have grouped the implications into two general categories: The first group is the vertical or Godward implications while the second is group is horizontal or manward implications. In other words, I'd like consider how these truths impact our relationship with Jesus and how they impact our relationship with one another.*

Let's look at the vertical implications first. If it's ok to not be ok and if Jesus is inviting us to come to him for rest and if everything has been given to Jesus by the Father, then how should this impact our relationship with God. First of all, it

should impact how we pray. It means we can be honest and candid with God. If we're hurting, we can tell Him. If we're angry, we can let Him know. If we have deep, faith-testing questions, we can ask Him. Maybe all we can do is groan because we are too tired or stressed or guilt ridden to say or think anything. Then just groan. Nothing in your heart or mind is a surprise to Jesus. He knows the blackest, bleakest corner of our hearts. And know this: he loves us anyway! Dear brother and sister in Christ, Rom 5:8 is always and forever true. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The next implication is that it should affect our worship. As the the song goes, oh the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free. Layered on top of saving us, layered on top of giving us his righteousness, layered on top of adopting us and bringing us back into the family of God, all of which are gracious gifts that defy our imaginations. Layered on top of all of that, these verses tell us that Jesus wants to give us even more. He wants to pile on and graciously give us the rest and relief we so desperately need.

For a moment, for even a split second, have you considered what it cost Jesus to give us this rest? If we no longer need to bear the load, who's bearing it? If we no longer need to worry or fret, who's taking care of the issue? If we are allowed to sleep all night (either literally or figuratively), who is staying up all night? The answer to each of these questions is Jesus. What an additional cause for us to worship. To adore Christ our Savior and Lord, Redeemer and Friend. And to say thank you to our good, good Father

who has given Jesus to us but has also given us to Jesus.

And, a third vertical implication is a deepening of our faith. Much, if not all, of Christian faith is paradoxical. For example: "the only way to save your life is to lose it". Or "what has happened to me (jail) has served to advance the gospel". Or "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" Each one of the statements and the myriads of others throughout God's word require faith. And so it is with the rest that Jesus provides. Will we trust him for it? Do we really believe that Jesus loves us that much and that his authority is so extensive that he can actually do what he promised he would do. This passage is calling us to exercise our faith and take Jesus at his word.

Now, I want to move to a few of the horizontal implications of our text. How do these verses impact our relationships within the church and our own families? The first implication that jumped out at me is that if we are all weak and wounded, sick and sore, then we are all equal in our need for the rest and relief that only Jesus can bring. And since we are all needy in some way or burdened in some way or just exhausted in some way, there is no ground for boasting. Instead, we are invited to see our brothers and sisters, each one of us, as people who need to be pointed (or maybe carried) to Jesus.

Another horizontal implication is one of freedom. If it's ok to be not ok, if Jesus is really inviting us to come with our weariness and struggles and guilt and shame and we are all in this together, then we no longer need to pretend that we've got it altogether. Since we have been freed up to be



honest with God, we are now freed up to be honest with each other. If our prayer life has become anemic, it's ok to share that. If our marriage has hit a prolonged dry patch, it's ok to admit it. If we are stressed at work or our kids are off the rails, we can be honest with each other. If our aging body or atrophying minds are causing anxiety, if doubts about our salvation plague us, if we are sitting here and want to raise our fist to God, we can be open to these struggles. We really are in this together. Together as a body and together with our Savior.

I want to pause here for just a moment to be really candid with you. You are my friends. You are my family. I want so much for this sermon to not simply be a theoretical exercise. I've prayed and pleaded that this sermon would be real for each one of you. As a result, the strong conviction I have is that if this sermon is going to be real for you, it has to be real for me. In other words, I need to be ok with not being ok.

So, I could spend the precious time we have together and say things like, I struggle just like you (which I do) or that I need the rest and relief only Jesus can provide just like you (which I do). But I don't think that models these implications very well. Instead, because Jesus is beckoning all of us, including me, to come to him for rest and because that rest and relief gives me the freedom to be open with God and with all of you, I want to share with you just one way the Spirit has brought the reality of this text home to me.

As many of you know, I have the honor as serving you as

the Chairman of the Elder Council. In that role, I've come to the point where I've realized I'm weary, fatigued to the point of exhaustion and heavy laden, carrying too big of a load and doing so improperly. My response to date has been: try harder, do it differently, bury my head or simply get frustrated. And then along comes Mt 11:28 and Jesus' sweet invitation to come to him for rest. So there I was, less than a week ago, well into crafting this sermon and not really owning it for myself. The invitation is sitting right in front of me and I hesitate to take it. You see, there is a very proud man standing up here this morning. And sometimes instead of having childlike faith, I have childish tantrums. Like the proverbial two year old, I basically tell God: I can do it myself.

But, this reality in me, and I think in some form, in each of us leads me to my final implication and it really ties this all together. Since Jesus is calling us to rest in him, to trust in him and take up his yoke and since we are now free to be honest with him and honest with each other, we have both the privilege and responsibility to pray for one another. You see, I don't simply need your high level, generic prayers. I also need street level, tear stained prayers.

As we make use of our freedom to express when we are not ok, we have this privilege of carrying each other's burdens before the throne of God's grace. Its a privilege because God has designed so much of the spiritual reality to work by the means of prayer. But it's a responsibility because we are family, true family. I've got your back. And you've mine. And it's a responsibility because we are all in this together. Our struggles may be different. What drags us down and

burdens us may be as unique as our fingerprints, but each one of us is still battling against sin, battling against self and battling against an enemy that seeks to devour us.

Here at LEFC, we are attempting to put tools in place for us to fulfill this responsibility and to engage in this privilege.

The first tool, which has been around for nearly a year is our post service prayer right up front each week. We are here to pray with you, not as people who have figured it out, but as people who are also weary and are seeking find our rest in Jesus.

The second tool we inaugurated a few months ago is our faith family prayer time. As the name implies, this is for us as a family. Brothers and sisters who are in the fight together and are desirous to lift each other and the needs of this body before the Father. On the 2nd Sunday of each month, including today, we can gather and pray of our common needs, both physical and spiritual

The third tool that we are developing and refining in this regard is our small group ministry. Ryan will have much more to say about small groups in September. But one of the key components of our small groups will be a venue where we can share with a closer group of folks the deep aches of our hearts. In a small group is probably the best place to begin realizing and practicing that it is ok to not be ok.

So, as we prepare to continue to worship via music, I want you to consider what load you might be under. What spiritual weight are you struggling to carry all by yourself? I

would ask you to take seriously the invitation of Jesus: Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden. He will give you rest. I would encourage you to own the reality that the Father has given all things to Jesus and that includes each one of us. And I would invite you join us for prayer, whether at the end of service or at our faith family prayer time or in a small group. Worship. Trust. Pray.