

The Second to Last Sunday of the Church Year | St. Matthew 11:25-30
November 13, 2016 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O Lord Jesus Christ, who will come again in majesty to judge the living and the dead and call forth all who sleep in the graves, either to the resurrection of life or to the resurrection of condemnation, we humbly ask You to be gracious unto us and to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that, when we shall depart this life, we may rest in You, and having been found acceptable in Your sight, may on the Last Day be raised up to life everlasting, inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world, and give You glory and praise, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 177)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the eleventh chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, beginning with the twenty-fifth verse. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

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." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, through whom we rest in peace here on earth and forever in heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

The election coverage last Tuesday and the ongoing analysis since, is all about categories. Victories and losses are explained on the basis of gender, level of education, age, race, place of residence, party affiliation, and more. We hear about Democrat vs. Republican vs. Independent, men vs. women, rural vs. urban, black vs. white vs. Hispanic, millennial vs. baby-boomer, educated vs. un-educated, Rust belt vs. Bible belt, coastland vs. interior, and so on. While it may give the newscasters and political analysts plenty to talk about, this categorization seems to treat voters as things or commodities instead of as people.

God does not divvy the human race into categories like this. He shows no partiality toward rich or poor, male or female, American or non-American, old or young. Each person by nature is sinful in His sight, and each one has been redeemed from sin and death by the blood of Jesus. Romans 3:23-24 says, "[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and [all] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." But not all believe in Jesus, and so not all are saved. This is why sinners can be rightly divided into two major categories, and only two: believers and unbelievers—or as we heard in today's Gospel reading: the sheep and the

goats. These distinct categories will never be as clear as they are when Jesus returns in glory on the Last Day.

Until that day comes, God promises to send His saving Gospel into the world, so that sinners may hear it and believe. **The Lord Offers Rest to All** because His grace and forgiveness cover all.

I

The Gospel of Jesus is what our country needs more than jobs, higher wages, diversity, tolerance, and security. Only the Gospel can secure for us the great reward of unending life in heaven. But in the opinion of many, the Gospel is worthless. They characterize it as a false dream, a crutch for the weak-minded, or a dangerous teaching that undermines human progress and the responsibility of the individual. They can tolerate Jesus, but only by remaking Him into a teacher who is simply there to pat you on the back when you do a good job.

People who look at Jesus like this are *“the wise and understanding”* that He talks about in today’s sermon text. Being referred to in this way seems like it would be a good thing, but not in this case. According to Jesus, *“the wise and understanding”* are the ones who think they are too clever and too intelligent for the Gospel. They have the world and their place in it settled in their own minds, and Jesus is no part of the equation. Instead of looking out for their neighbor, they are concerned only with fulfilling their own plans, indulging their own desires, and getting what their confused minds tell them they deserve.

Just before the words of today’s text, Jesus criticized the Jewish people—His own people—for witnessing His mighty works and hearing His gracious words, but still rejecting Him. Some of the Jews certainly did believe in Him, but others convinced themselves that they needed no Savior. They ignored their nagging consciences and gloried in their own works and abilities. They labored and felt the burden of the law, but they would have no rest. The grace of God was hidden to them in their unbelief.

But God’s grace has come to the *“little children.”* 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.”* Little children are those who make no claim to wisdom and understanding. They are infants who must receive all good things from another, if they would remain alive. Through the law of God, the Holy Spirit teaches you to see yourself this way. The law tells you that your best effort is not good enough. It tells you that your hard labor to be holy in God’s sight will not pay off. The law delivers the message that on your own you are helpless, just like an infant.

But God the Father loves His children. This is why He sent His only Son, begotten of Him from eternity and born in time to the Virgin Mary. Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life from beginning to end – from the time He was conceived, through the day of His birth, through His childhood, teenage years, twenties, and all the way until His death on the cross. His effort to save you was enough. His hard labor on your behalf did pay off. His holy life for you fulfilled the strict demands of the law, and His blood blotted out all your transgressions.

When Jesus spoke the words of today’s text, His work had not yet been completed. But it was as

good as done, because God keeps His promises, and He promised to save sinners. God the Father gave all authority to His Son to carry out this task. Jesus said, *"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."* Jesus did not use this authority in a harsh way, like a self-centered dictator. He is patient and forgiving toward mankind, a kind and gentle King.

II

"Come to me," He says. *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* If you have flesh and live in this world, you do labor and are heavy laden. You feel the curse of sin every single day, a curse that brings pain and trouble and ultimately death (Gen. 3:16-19). But Jesus refreshes you along the way. For every anxiety and fear, He comforts you. For every doubt, He reassures you. For every temptation, He strengthens you. For every hurt and pain, He heals you. For every unkindness, every regrettable action and attitude, for every sin, He forgives you. Jesus won for you the warm embrace of your heavenly Father by breaking down the barrier of sin and death that separated you from Him. By His humble sacrifice, Jesus opened for you the way to the Father's love, which is yours by faith in Him.

This is why you can be at rest even in this imperfect world. You are no longer at odds with God. You do not have to appease Him like so many false religions teach. The wrath of God was appeased for all eternity by the death of the God-Man Jesus. Your salvation is secure in Him. St. Paul writes, *"neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8:38-39).

God in His grace and mercy offers rest to all people through faith in Jesus. It is the only thing that can give true hope in uncertain times, the only thing that can heal the deep divisions in our country and the world. You see how easily people despair when they do not get what they want. And we are like this too. But when we put all our hopes in human wisdom and political movements, we are always disappointed. The psalmist writes, *"Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin"* (Ps. 146:3-9).

We pray that the Lord helps our elected officials rule in the right way, so the Gospel can continue to be freely proclaimed in our land. But we also know that government officials do not always do what is right. We know that there will be tension between Christ's Church and this fallen world. As disciples of Jesus, we who are in the world but not of it, will bear the cross. But the cross we have by faith in Jesus is a light burden compared with the eternal weight of sin. Jesus said, *"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."* A childlike trust in Jesus will never be disappointed, and it will be rewarded on the Last Day.

When Jesus returns in all His glory to judge the world, He will once again invite you to come to Him. On that day, He will say to the believers at His right hand, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Mt. 25:34). Then you will join Him eternally in heaven, where there will be no more categorizations and no more divisions. Then all will be regarded in exactly the same way – as God’s holy children, *“a people blessed by the Lord”* (Is. 65:23).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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