

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost • July 5, 2020ⁱ

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

Rev. Braun Campbell

Matthew 11:25-30 (Zechariah 9:9-12)

“Relief”

“There ain’t no rest for the wicked.”

That’s the expression, right? You might have said it jokingly about yourself or someone else who’s having to deal with one thing after the next. The challenges keep coming, even as you labor diligently to get things done. The work never ceases. Life seems that way sometimes.

My family has been busy as of late. You might have had a similar experience over the past few months as schools closed and shifted to home-based learning. Juggling work and serving as someone’s unlicensed, untrained teacher can get a little wearying, right? After a while, you get the hang of it (more or less). But after the school year finished up and summer began, you’ve got to pivot again to make sure you’ve got childcare and social interaction for the kids, now that most summer programs have been canceled. That’s what life’s like these days. Beyond all that, my wife and I have been working to prepare our coworkers for the time once we’ve moved away – and possibly get ahead on some things while we’re at it. Maybe you’ve gone through times like these yourself.

I was looking for a little bit of relief, a brief respite from all the things we’ve got going on. I found an excellent pair of headphones. Almost out of nowhere, I got notice that an electronics distributor was selling refurbished sets of the top-ranked noise-cancelling headphones, one that I’d been considering for a year or so. These were in mint condition, for nearly half off the price you’d pay for a new pair most places. After getting the go-ahead from my wife, I jumped at the opportunity. I was not disappointed. These headphones work *really* well, basically deleting outside sound while I listen to music or podcasts. (In fact, they might work *too* well, as my wife is now regretting giving me that go-ahead.) But there’s only so much they can do to provide respite from the outside world. While resting on my bed listening to relaxing nature sounds, I came to this realization as my kids charged into the room and flung themselves on Daddy to get him to play hide-and-seek. The respite doesn’t last.

There ain’t no rest for the wicked. The challenges keep coming.

As our nation celebrates its birthday this Fourth of July weekend, I’m glad to be able to report that 2020 is now officially 50% completed! We’ve all had to contend with the massive disruption that the pandemic has brought into the world, some having more to deal with than others. Unrest continues in our society. We’re only just now getting back into onsite worship in our life together as a congregation. And, if I’m not mistaken, there’s still a national election coming up later this year.

Are you looking for a bit of relief? Would you enjoy a respite from the challenges that this year has brought into your life? Maybe you’ve had other challenges, too, ones which go back far longer than what 2020’s thrown your way. Wouldn’t it be great if you could somehow just cancel out all the noise and get some peace? I’d understand if you had sought out things or experiences that might offer the chance at some peace. But I suspect that nothing you’d find could fully deliver on what you’d need. Even if they performed well for a while, the respite they offer wouldn’t last. **Relief from the struggles we have in the world can’t come from the things of the world.** They’re simply not adequate. There’s no way they can cover all our need.

There ain’t no rest for the wicked. The challenges keep coming.

If there’s one big plus we might see in the year so far, it’s that 2020 has highlighted the truth: our world is broken. You and I live in a world where things aren’t perfect. You’ve seen the evidence. You’ve probably felt it, too. That which should be a joy becomes a grind. One challenge follows another. Where can you look in the world for a hope which persists? We might turn to the things of the world for hope – our doctors, our friends, our political parties, our possessions – but none of them are enough. None of them will last. But that’s life, right?

The curse of sin, our separation from our Creator and from each other, weighs us down. It crushes us all. It’s the heaviest weight out there. You and I can’t get out from under it. Nothing in the world is going to lift it from off your shoulders: nothing out there can make you right with God. Nothing in yourself will, either. The relief from sin that you and I need must come from outside us, from outside our broken world.

There ain’t no rest for the wicked. And that’s exactly why Jesus comes to us.

Jesus comes into our broken world and our broken lives. He keeps coming to seek out the broken, the weary, those crushed by the reality of a world wrecked by the wickedness of our sin. Jesus invites us to know the relief that only he can deliver. He says, “*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.*” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Our relief comes in being yoked to Jesus. Imagen oxen linked together with a yoke, a bridge, keeping them in unison as they work on a farm. The oxen plow the fields, sharing the load, doing much more than a farmer could do by himself. But yoked to Jesus? You might think that sounds heavy. “Why am I not better off on my own, free and independent?” Our problem comes from the fact that, independently, we can’t carry the load. We can’t even pull our own weight. But yoked to Jesus, something happens.

Connected with him, you and I can know peace with God. You don’t have to lift the burden of sin from your own shoulders. You don’t have to make yourself right with God. Jesus does it, for you. Jesus does all the lifting to restore you and me to our Father and his Father. There ain’t no rest for the wicked. But Jesus has humbly carried our wickedness. He carried it with him to the cross. He carried it into death. And he’s given you his righteousness. You may rest in him. Sin’s power over you is broken.

Yoked to Jesus, you can **focus** on what truly matters amid all the challenges of this life. When Jesus says, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” that doesn’t mean you’ll have an easy life. That doesn’t mean that you’re set free from the challenges of this world. But it does mean that **he goes with you**. He’s the one who will guide you. As you follow him, he’s the one who will see you through.

Jesus’ **strength** is there for you. That doesn’t mean those challenges won’t come. But he is there for you, even in those times of struggle. He’s the one pulling the load.

We know that relief from the struggles we have in the world can’t come from the things of the world. But in Christ, we have one who will carry us through.

Your hope is here. Your hope is come in Jesus. If you go back to our Old Testament reading from the prophet Zechariah, you’ll hear some of the same words that the people would have proclaimed and shouted out when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, what we call the triumphal entry. Today, we get to celebrate with them that the Messiah, the Christ, God’s anointed one, has come. He has come to carry our burden. He has come to deliver the relief that we need.

This is a hope which will not fade. This is a hope which will outlast anything that our world might offer, no matter how great it might seem. We can enjoy the gifts that God gives us, the relationships that we have, the nation where we’re blessed to live. But far and away the greatest blessing that we have been given is the life we have with God in Christ Jesus.

So on this Fourth of July weekend, as we celebrate the gifts God has given us, don’t look to the things around you for your hope. Don’t turn to the things of the world for hope which lasts. Instead, come to Jesus, who is gentle and strong for us, and know the peace, the respite, the relief that only he can deliver.

Amen.

ⁱ Passage for memory:

[Jesus said.] *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* – Matthew 11:28