

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - July 27, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29) Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The vacation season is upon us once again. Perhaps you have already enjoyed a vacation. Or maybe you are still looking forward to a break from your daily routine – and a bit of rest and relaxation. Vacations are wonderful but sooner or later they come to an end and we have to settle back into the reality of our daily routines – routines that often leave us feeling worn down, fatigued and longing for another vacation.

Sometimes even a vacation can end up leaving us feeling a bit worn out and exhausted, can't it? We need to be constantly on our guard to the temptations of Satan who never takes a vacation and is always seeking to lead us away from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of sin there really is no way that we can ever find perfect rest and satisfaction on our own. That's why Jesus' invitation sounds so intriguing to us. Over the years our family has discovered some rather interesting vacation destinations and attractions – but not one of them offered an invitation like Jesus' offers in our text.

Jesus Offers the Perfect Never-Ending Vacation

1. He invites you to come with his outstretched arms
2. He promises to be with us for the entire journey

When we think of Jesus' invitation "come to me," we might think of him as opening his arms and extending his hands toward us. Jesus did stretch out his arms as his hands were nailed to the cross. His outstretched arms are an invitation to come to him. Jesus spoke of his death to his disciples and said: (John 12:32-33 NIV) **But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." 33) He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.**

Those outstretched arms not only offer us an invitation but they offer us a challenge. Notice Jesus doesn't just say to us, "Come." He calls those who are "weary and burdened" and longing for spiritual rest to come. And that's where the challenge lies. That challenge was illustrated for me in an interesting fashion while I was on vacation a number of years ago at a Renaissance Festival – We were treated to costumes and imagery from 16th century England as various actors and actresses enacted "skits" depicting life from that time period.

One of the little skits took place in the graveyard where the grave digger was burying the sins of one of the local residents. If you've ever been to a Renaissance Festival you know that the characters want to involve the visitors in their skits. So as long as the grave digger had his shovel ready he offered to bury the sins of the spectators – so long as they would admit those sins to him. That's when those observing the presentation got to feeling a bit uncomfortable. Especially when they were personally asked if they had any sins they wanted buried! Relatively few people were willing to admit their sins – I must admit I felt relieved that I wasn't asked to identify a particular sin to be buried. To keep the little skit moving the grave digger decided that he'd bury the sin of denial since hardly anyone was willing to share their sins!

The grave digger had a shallow grave into which he had placed leaves and twigs and stones each representing the sins of the local resident and the spectators. Before he began the burial process he asked the local resident to say farewell to her sins. As the local resident was getting ready to say farewell to her sins – she began to

second guess herself. She wasn't quite sure she was ready to part with them all. One by one she decided she'd like them back and so the grave digger returned her "sins" and the sins of the spectators.

Most people are like the characters in that skit – they're not quite ready to admit their sins and if even they do they're not quite ready to part with them. It's hard for us to admit that we're not the person that we like to think we are. It's hard to admit that we frequently fall short of God's expectations for us. We like to think that we're really not all that bad. But that's a dangerous way of thinking because it leads to self-righteousness. Jesus' invitation is for all because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Yet it is only the heart that recognizes the burden of sin and longs for relief who will find Jesus' invitation of interest.

How does Jesus' invitation strike you? Do you have a tender conscience that is pricked by the law and longs for rescue from the burden of your sin? Listen to what Jesus says of the Father: (Matthew 12:20 NIV) **A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory.** If you feel bruised and battered by sin, you can take comfort in Jesus outstretched arms which invite you to come to him for rest, relief and rescue from sin. He will delicately remove your burdens as he invites you to go hand in hand with him through this life to eternity.

How does Jesus' invitation strike you? Are you luke-warm about it? Filled with self satisfaction? Are you comfortable with your life? Before you turn away from that invitation and decide that it's not for you – take a deep look down inside and compare what you see with the requirement of perfection which God's law demands of those who seek to justify themselves before him. Don't foolishly add the sin of denial to your load. Listen carefully to these words: (1 John 1:8-10 NIV) **If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10) If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.**

The first challenge that confronts us as we hear Jesus' invitation is admitting our need for the invitation. The more we listen to what God says about us the more we will become convinced of our need for the rest that Jesus offers. But then comes a second challenge – believing what Jesus says. Is it possible that Jesus can offer us this never ending vacation in which we are free from our sins and yet will live in joy and happiness?

If we run across a vacation brochure describing a destination that seems too good to be true – we're likely to approach it with a bit of caution – we'll do a bit more research before we buy our tickets. We'll want to be sure the offer is credible.

Jesus is claiming that he will give us rest for our souls. He guarantees that he will give us peace with God. So let's consider Jesus' credentials. Before Jesus was born the angelic messenger announced to Joseph that the child which his bride to be was carrying was from God. This child was to be given to name Jesus – because he would save his people from their sins.

At his birth angel messengers announced – unto you a Savior is born he is Christ the Lord. Throughout his life on this earth Jesus carefully and completely fulfilled each and every expectation that God had for us. At the close of his life in this world Jesus was forsaken by his Father as he bore the punishment that our sins deserved. Jesus proved that he has a gentle and humble heart sympathetic to the plight of the weary and the burdened. After his death and burial he rose again from the dead and returned to heaven where he intercedes for us. His resurrection verifies that he is the Lord God who has earned the right to give peace and rest to his people. He removes your sins and restores your fellowship with God. Jesus has the credentials – he is the Son of God.

You do not have to be afraid of taking his hand and going where he leads. **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30) For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**

These are some rather interesting words. Yokes come in various forms. Sometimes a yoke joined two animals together so they could pull a heavy load. The Bible often used this term to talk about being bound or oppressed in slavery or by sin. Consider for example the words of Galatians 5:1 -- (Galatians 5:1 NIV) **It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.** So we might wonder how Jesus could speak of a yoke that's easy and a burden that's light.

When my wife and I traveled to China a number of years ago we saw some of the street vendors who used a yoke to help them carry their heavy loads – it was a long stick which stretched across their shoulders. Attached to each end of the stick were ropes with buckets filled with their goods. By using the yoke as a balancing bar they could carry some pretty heavy loads – loads which would have been too heavy or difficult for them to carry without the benefit of the yoke. The yoke made their burden light.

Without the forgiveness and peace that Jesus offers us – we would remain under the yoke of the Law – obligated to provide perfection to God. That's a burden which is impossible for anyone to carry. The guilt of our sins would oppress us and make us miserable. No other human being would be able to help us carry the load because each of us has more sins and more guilt of our own than we can handle. That's where Jesus steps into the picture and offers to join himself to us. With his strength and perfection we can carry the load. When we walk hand in hand with Jesus we are denying ourselves and are willing to follow him wherever he leads us with his Word no matter where or what it might be. We're letting God be God.

Obviously the rest that Jesus offers is not a do-nothing vacation. It's better. Jesus yoke is easy because he does all the work. Yet we have been called by grace to walk in his foot steps. So...we love because he first loved us. We are committed to him because he was first committed to us. He paid for all of our sins and sets us free. He fights our battles for us and declares us the victor. He gives us his mighty power and armor to equip us for any remaining battles which will confront us. He provides an escape from temptation so we can stand. Jesus promises to go with us all the way. He doesn't just point us in the right direction and say, "I hope you find your way."

Jesus is our relief, our rescue, our rest at every turn. And so we see that the perfect never-ending vacation that Jesus promises doesn't depend upon us at all. It rests only on Jesus who broke the yoke of our slavery to sin and removed its guilt on the cross. He daily lifts us up and carries us on eagles' wings.

The vacation that Jesus offers us begins as we follow him in this life – it will continue into eternity where we will enjoy rest from our labors, our struggles with sin and our own imperfection in the eternal presence of our loving Savior.

Please stand and open your hymnals to hymn 372 and let's join in singing verses 1- 3 of "I Lay My Sins on Jesus."

I lay my sins on Jesus, The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us From the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus To wash my crimson stains
.White in his blood most precious Till not a spot remains

I rest my soul on Jesus, This weary soul of mine.
His right hand me embraces; I in his arms recline.
I love the name of Jesus, Immanuel, Christ, the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes His name abroad is poured.

I lay my wants on Jesus; All fullness dwells in him.
He heals all my diseases; My soul he does redeem.
I lay my griefs on Jesus, My burdens and my cares;
He from them all releases; He all my sorrows shares. Amen.