

“I CAN HANDLE IT!”  
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Romans 7:15-25a

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Any of you ever have a child who didn't want to go to bed, like that little boy in the children's book? I'm guessing a lot of you could identify with that. You remember what it's like, or, if you have small children these days, know what it's like to hear "just one more book?" or "one more drink of water!" or "one more thought to share" or "one more kiss!" They just don't want to give up or give in to sleep, even though they might have run around all day and be dead tired.

Well, you know what? Jesus was talking to a bunch of dead tired people in today's gospel lesson, only they were dead tired for a different reason. They were dead tired from trying to keep all of the religious laws and prove they were good people. As one pastor put it, "Jesus makes a plea to those who are burdened by the law. To those who in their own strength are trying to please God. He makes a plea to those who have been weighed down with the laws and customs of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who have been told that if they are not perfect, all will suffer." (Online, "Rest for the Weary," Christopher Nurreau, SermonCentral.com)

Trying to live up to all that was killing them, tying them up in knots inside, wearing them out. They were dead tired.

Well, you know what? I have a feeling that Jesus is talking to a lot of dead tired people today too – including a lot of people right here in this room. We're tired for lots of reasons – it's not religious laws that are wearing us out, it's that we're overworked, overwhelmed, overburdened, and sometimes even hopeless. We're tired.

And just like that little boy we fight it. We think we can handle it, and we can do it our own way, but we can't and instead it handles us, it wears us down. Why do we do that?

Jesus offers us a great gift that he speaks of at the end of this passage. He offers to give us rest, and yet, too often we don't accept that gift. Why is that? Why when we're dead tired, do we not accept the gift he offers us?

Well, I think there are a few reasons for that. For one, we really do think we can handle everything ourselves. Which means we either think too much of ourselves – that we can fix everything that's broken; or that we think too little of

ourselves – “I’m not going to ask for help because I don’t want anyone to know how overwhelmed I am.”

Any of that sound familiar? Sometimes, clearly, our pride gets in the way of our own self-interest and we don’t accept help, thinking we can handle it ourselves.

A second reason I think we might not accept the help Jesus offers is because we blame ourselves for our own situations. We’re embarrassed or ashamed. We feel like we’ve caused our own problem, whatever that might be, and we feel guilty about it. We identify with what Paul said in the Epistle lesson, how he does the thing he knows he shouldn’t do, and doesn’t do what he knows he should do.

All of us can surely identify with him on that, and when we’re worn down because of something we’ve caused ourselves, we turn on ourselves and don’t turn to Jesus.

For whatever reason we don’t turn to Jesus and accept his gift of rest, one thing is sure – we end up wallowing in our problems and get more overwhelmed than ever. It’s a cycle that never ends. And instead of running to Jesus, we end up running away from him.

Yet, like that mother in the book who was right there for her son, so Jesus is for us. Right there for us. Right there wanting to lift our burdens, and give us rest for our weariness. Right there, loving us so much he wants to help us, but waiting for us to reach out and receive it.

I know that that mother and all parents and others who love children just want what’s best for them – and if that’s the case with earthly parents, how much more does God love us? It must grieve God to see how we hurt ourselves, how worn down we get, how we don’t accept help, and especially, how hard we are on ourselves, how we beat ourselves up, and count ourselves unworthy.

You know, that reminds me of a little story I once heard that really made an impact on me. A speaker was making a presentation to a large group of people and he took a crisp \$20 bill out of his pocket, held it up for all to see, and then asked, “How many of you would like to have this \$20 bill?” Well, tons of hands went up in the air.

Then he said, “I’m going to give it to one of you, but first . . .” and he proceeded to crumple the \$20 bill. Then he held it up and said, “Who wants it now?” And again, lots of hands went up everywhere.

“Well,” he replied, “what if I do this?” And he took the crumpled bill, dropped it on the ground, and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. Then he picked it up, held the crumbled, dirty, smudged bill in the air, and said, “Who wants it now?” And for the third time, lots of hands went up.

Then he said, “My friends, you have just learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. No matter how smudged and crumpled it became, it was still worth \$20.”

And the one who told this story continued with these words: “Many times in our lives, we get knocked around – dropped, crumpled, smudged, and ground into the dirt – by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. And sometimes we feel as though we are worthless and used up and of no account. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God’s eyes. To God, dirty or clean, crumple or finely creased, you are priceless!” (James W. Moore, *If God Has a Refrigerator, Your Picture is On It!*, “Celebrating God’s Healing Love,” p. 87.)

He’s right – we are priceless in God’s eyes, no matter what – yet, too often we don’t believe it, and don’t turn to him when we need help, when we’re tired and desperately need rest.

Jesus’ prayer and my prayer is that we will accept the gift he offers – the gift of taking away our weariness and lifting our burdens. We need not make it harder than it is, because it’s simply a matter of letting go, and asking Christ to take over. It’s surrendering, and saying “I can’t handle it, and I don’t need to handle it Lord, because I trust you to walk me through it all.”

While that may not be easy for those of us who are control freaks, it’s the only way to find rest for our souls and the easing of our burdens. But it’s not just that, it’s the pathway to new life as well.

In a wonderful sermon on this text, one pastor said that as soon as you lay your burdens down at Jesus’ feet, and let him take your weariness away, you will feel relief, and his living water can flow fresh through you, and you’ll feel new energy to face whatever life has in store for you.

And he illustrated it like this: “Have you ever (he writes) felt a big rest or relief after a long struggle or labor? You’ve been working outside all day under the hot sun. Your muscles are aching and tired. You’re drenched and drained from a long day of labor. Then you come inside. You take a shower, change your clothes, drink about a gallon of refreshing liquid, and you can sit down and relax. Now take that feeling and multiply it by about a billion. And that’s what the rest and refreshment and relief that Jesus gives is like. You have rest now for your soul, knowing that your sins are forgiven and that it’s not up to you to earn your salvation. You have rest for both soul and body for eternity, knowing that Christ has won your resurrection from the dead and gives you life everlasting with God and all the company of heaven.” (On-line, Pastor Charles Hendrickson, “Rest for the Weary”)

Now, who doesn't want that, my friends? Who doesn't want to feel that? Who doesn't want to know that weariness and burdens don't have to have the final word? Who doesn't want to know that we don't have to fix everything ourselves? Who doesn't want to know that no matter how bad we feel about ourselves, or how much we blame ourselves, that there is a God who loves us in spite of that, who loves us simply for who we are – his beloved children? Who doesn't want to know that?

Oh dear friends, if you have come here today burdened in any way, if you have come here dead tired from trying to handle everything yourself, if you have come here today feeling like you've messed everything up, if you've come here today knowing that like Paul, you do the things you know you shouldn't do, and don't do those things you know you should do, if you have come here today and you're feeling overwhelmed – oh dear friends, hear the Good News of the Gospel. Jesus has the answer, Jesus is the answer, and he wants to give you rest, to take away your weariness, to lift your burdens, to grant you peace.

Won't you accept his gift, and let go of all that holds you down and holds you back? Won't you say "yes" and feel the relief that his love will pour into you? Won't you say "yes" and feel his living water rushing through you filling you with new energy for the days ahead? I hope you will, because it's a gift Jesus freely offers and he wants to give it to you now, this very day.

So I want to close with an invitation by way of a story.

One day a woman was teaching a class and she decided to give her students a creative worship experience. She gave each student a long piece of kite rope and asked them to shape it into something that symbolized where they were in their spiritual journey, and then they would share their symbol with the whole group.

When it came time to share, one girl held up her string and she had a knot tied at the end. She said, "Lately things have been going all wrong. Nothing is working. I feel like I'm at the end of my rope, but I've tied a knot on it and am holding on."

They continued around the circle. Another girl's string looked the same as it did when the instructor had given it to her. She said, "I came to the end of my rope too, but I didn't tie a knot. I decided to let go and drop. The surprising thing is that God caught me." (Sue Monk Kidd, *When the Heart Waits*, p. 114)

The surprising thing is that God caught me. Oh dear friends, God will catch you. So let go of the knot. Let go of the things that have you tied in knots. Let go of the weariness and the burdens in your life, and give them to the Lord – and let him set you free. May it be so. Amen.