

July 9, 2017  
Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
St Peter Lutheran Church  
Bowie, TX  
Larry Knobloch, Pastor  
Matthew 11:25-30

*J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus*

Matthew 11:25–30 (ESV)

**Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest**

<sup>25</sup> 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; <sup>26</sup> yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

What does it mean to be a Christian?

Look in the media today, and you're likely to walk away thinking that being a Christian is primarily defined by the sorts of people you judge or look down on—particularly those who judge others. Ask someone outside the Church, and you're liable to get a number of ideas about things Christians don't do—don't drink, don't dance, don't get abortions, and don't or love or even associate with those who do. Even inside the Church, we sometimes view the faith as primarily about doing the right thing or acting the right way.

The truth is that Christianity has a lot of rules. We might call them traditions or other fancy sounding names but they are rules. Growing up, I don't ever remember laughing in church, it seemed like nobody smiled. We always wore our suit and tie. In the 70's and early 80's it was a three piece suit, or at least a sport coat slacks, dress shirt and tie. That was a simple outward tradition, but it was a rule.

There are lots more like when we stand or which way we turn. Some about how Holy Communion is set up, what kind of candles are used, what color the carpet is, when to stand, when to sit, and on and on.

God gives us the important Laws. There are 10 of them but they are far reaching because they have to do not only with our action, but with our inaction. What we should or shouldn't do ...oh, and don't forget thought and word.

We have whole books of the Bible full of instructions on how to live and how not to live and because we know these rules, we live with the knowledge that we need to live up to them. They aren't like the traditions of men. They may be important in the here and now but God's Laws are important eternally!

But the sad truth is, we know we *don't* live up to them. We might try, but we just can't do it. The apostle Paul in our Epistle this morning knew he couldn't do it either. *"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing."* Rom 7:18–19

So what do we do? We are in the same boat as Paul and even worse. Well some of us figure it out. We know how to handle that in the Church. We lie!

We come on a Sunday morning with the intent of concealing the worst, most sinful, most broken parts of ourselves, because if anyone ever saw those things, they'd never speak to us again.

Our children could never play with their children. We'd be outcasts if anyone ever knew the truth about us, right? The devil pushes this thought further in further in our minds until we don't even want to show our face much less believe that we can be forgiven.

And once we believe that, then the Christian life becomes little more than an exercise in how well I can hide my sin from you so that I at least keep up the appearance. And because we all keep up the appearances, it continues the lie that being Christians is primarily about being "good people."

And if we want to be a good person, then we really need to do something, before someone finds out the truth!

So we get into the cycle of “try harder.” And when we fall short, we often pick ourselves up and brush the dust off.

Have you ever fell down or even just tripped? What was the first thing you did? You looked around to see if someone saw you. The fall may not have been that bad, but heaven forbid someone sees you and hurts your pride.

When we sin, no matter how hard we try, we know this isn't how it's supposed to be. We don't want anyone to catch us failing again so we commit to ourselves, to others, and sometimes even to God, to try harder. We don't want anyone to catch us failing again

And this time we're serious.  
This time we're going to get it right.

This time we'll live the way we know we should.  
And to our credit, we really mean it. We get really serious, we try really hard, and we may even get it right . . . for a while...for a minute, or even maybe an hour, especially if we are sleeping.

And then we fall, and we're right back where we started again.  
We see the people of Israel do this over and over again in the Bible, and things haven't really changed so much.

I recently heard the story of an experiment that was done about 45 years ago.

*In the 1970s, psychologists were keen on examining the effects of different learning scenarios, often using laboratory rats as subjects. In one particularly cruel experiment, researchers electrified a portion of a cage floor. Not surprisingly, the rats quickly learned to evade the shock by jumping to locations where no shock was applied. But when the entire floor was electrified, an interesting phenomenon occurred. The rats attempted to evade the shock a few times, but quickly discovered that there was nowhere they could go to be safe. Rather than keep trying, though, the rats finally settled down and accepted being shocked. They had learned that they were helpless. Even when escape routes were later offered by turning off one portion of the shocking mechanism, the rats had already learned there was no point in trying and failing, and they helplessly refused to move.*

*The same phenomenon occurs in people when we try something over and over and over and fail. We learn that we're helpless and the obvious answer is to stop trying. The burden is just too heavy, completely debilitating (Mt 11:28–30).*

(William S. C. Johnson, Fort Wayne, IN)

Like that rat, we find ourselves helpless; helpless in our sinful nature.

We can't change ourselves. We do things we know we shouldn't, and we don't do things we know we should, and when we can't stop the cycle, we eventually just sit there and take the shock. Why bother. Either way, we have no hope of ever succeeding.

In the end, we can only conclude that either this is all a lie or that there's something fundamentally broken and wrong with us as individuals.

We just can't do it. We can't bear the weight. *(pause)*

Into this reality, Jesus speaks and proclaims, “*Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (v 28). Wait; what?

It’s as if Jesus knows what is in our head, as He continues:

*“My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”*

That bears repeating: Come to Jesus, no matter what kind of burden or load you are carrying. Give it to Him and He will give you rest. What a bargain!

He exchanges your sinful burden, the burden you have been yoked with for His yoke and burden. *As He said: “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light”.*

The Christian life is not about being a better person, and it never has been. In fact, there’s a well-worn Latin phrase we’ve had in the Lutheran family for almost 500 years now: *simul justus et peccator*, which means “simultaneously saint yet sinner.” We are both!

There’s great freedom in recognizing and owning that reality.

We don’t have to pretend anymore! We can quit hiding and own up to our sin.

We get to be real, true, honest sinners ... with a real, true, powerful Savior. When, not if, when we fall short and fail, we’re not surprised.

We’re not in our heavenly home yet. And anything to do with our salvation that starts with us is doomed to failure.

That burden, that yoke, those failures have all been carried, done, for us by Christ. Christ carried the burden of our every shortfall, every time we didn’t have fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23-24)

Christ wore that yoke of obedience all the way to the cross! Even though we might feel like we are trapped in a vicious cycle, Jesus has already taken care of it.

Christ's perfect obedience, perfect keeping of every law, is given to us, counted as ours.

And Christ took the whole burden of the world's sin—yours, mine, everyone's—upon himself when He died on the cross.

Now we wear that yoke of Christ by believing in Him. But see how it feels—how easy!—how little it weighs!—because Christ has carried the load. He has pulled the weight.

Jesus tells you: *“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”* And that's why we come here, week after week. Because the truth is that we forget who we are.

Many of us are going to walk out the door today and head to lunch, and though we'll all know Christ's Words and we'll know His love, we'll still immediately start living as if it all depends on how hard we try... or worse yet, start living as if we don't care about His love. We do our bit on Sunday and the rest of the week is ours to do as we please.

We all have a need to be reminded, week after week. And I need to hear it as badly as you do.

In case you've forgotten . . . this is who you are: you are dearly loved. You do not have to pretend anymore because your salvation doesn't depend on you. You are loved, not because of what you've done, can do, or ever will do.

That doesn't mean that you don't try to do what is right. But know that you are beloved despite your failures. And know that it is because you are a creation of the God of the heavens who has marked you with water and Word in Baptism.

Your heavenly Father, for the sake of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, invites you to come with empty hands to His Table of body and blood, bread and wine.

You are His beloved, not because you try harder or get it right this time or even because you might get it right next time.

You are loved because of what Christ has already done for you. He has died your death. You do not have to pretend any more.

The true yoke, His, is easy. The true burden, His, is light. Amen.  
Amen.

The Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

*S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria*

### **Sermon Outline**

#### ***My Yoke Is Easy, and My Burden Is Light***

*Matthew 11:25–30*

- I. Christianity has a lot of rules, But the truth is that we all know we *don't* live up to them.
- II. We can be sad, yet honest, sinners because we have a Savior.
- III. We don't have to pretend anymore.