



Pastor Caleb Douglas' Sermon

**SERMON – 6TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
MATTHEW 11:25-30
JUNE 11, 2023**

This weekend's Gospel lesson includes one of the most famous lines in all the New Testament. They are worth hearing once again: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

Surely these are some of the most comforting words ever to have been spoken. These words tell us what we already know to be true about this world: this is a place of labor, of work. When God made our first parents—Adam and Eve—he set them in a garden and told them to tend it and to expand it. The whole face of the earth was to become the fruitful and tended garden of the Lord. That would not have happened apart from a long and careful labor. They were placed into this world to work. We were created to work.

But it was not only physical labor that Adam and Eve were created for. They were also called to a higher work, then work of walking with God, of learning from him more and more about the world that they were set in, more and more about themselves, and ultimately more and more about God himself. They were created to learn from him what it is to be wise, which is the same thing as knowing the difference between good and evil, and living accordingly.

But, as we know, Adam and Eve were not content with coming to the Lord to grow in wisdom. They tried to short-circuit this long and careful labor. Instead of learning from God day by day how to distinguish between good and evil, they turned to a different source. They believed a serpent who said, "God knows that when you eat of [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Genesis continues: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate" (Genesis 3:6).

Did you hear all of the things that they thought they would gain in eating of the tree? They thought they would receive delight and pleasure, they were told they would become like God, knowing good and evil, and they thought the fruit would make them wise. Each of those are important, but this morning, the last is what is especially important. In eating of the tree, they sought for wisdom. Now the search for wisdom is not what is wrong. What was wrong was *where* they sought for wisdom. For they had been deceived by the father of lies. Turning away from the only wise God they thought they could find wisdom. Turning away from the one who is alone Good, they thought they could then know the difference between good and evil. And with this folly, came two curses. The serpent is cursed—to some day be crushed like the vile, venomous, loathsome creature that he is.

But the ground too is cursed: Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you. ... In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Genesis 3:17b–19)

Creation, the source of earthly life, is now under the curse of God. No longer does it easily produce food for mankind. Only through the sweat of one's brow can it produce what man desires.

Now I think that we are to see a lot more in this curse than that which we walk on. It is more than just the ground that is cursed here. Otherwise, we might be tempted to think that the curse is primarily a *technological* problem—a problem that could be solved if only we had a better tractor and more fertilizer.

Ever since I was a little boy, I have been fascinated by machines: all kinds of machines. But especially farming and manufacturing machines. I recently saw a tomato harvester that can harvest one ton of tomatoes *per minute*, that's two thousand pounds per minute. It is an astounding machine. Soon enough, and maybe we are already there, there will not even need to be a person in the driver's seat, it will be driven by a computer. Has technology lifted the curse brought about by sin? If it hasn't yet, could it sometime in the future?

The curse extends far further than just to the difficulty of growing food—otherwise the Guares Super G Tomato Harvester has basically lifted the curse. No. The curse extends to everything that is included in our earthly life.

What is under the curse is the work of being human. That means that our relationships are under the curse. The tasks of being faithful husbands and fathers, wives and mothers and children are complex and difficult. It is hard work to be a good father or mother, a good son or daughter, and all of the rest. Not only is it at times very difficult to know what we should do in our relationships, it is just as often difficult to have the will to actually do what we know we should do. That was what Saint Paul was talking about in what we heard from Romans. Who of us has not at times hurt the ones that are closest to us? Who of us could not say with Saint Paul, "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." The work of being human is under the curse.

Also under the curse is the work of being a good steward over God's creation. I won't belabor this point, but we were created to be lords over creation. But we all know that the very dust of which we are composed is bent on reclaiming us as its own: dust you are, and to dust you shall return. Unless the Lord return, all shall someday submit to the curse of death.

And finally, under the curse too is the work of walking with God. The line between good and evil runs through each of our own hearts, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn famously said. There is something within us that constantly seeks to turn us away from the source of our life. There is not one of us who has not known the temptation to turn away from God, to find our comfort and our hope in something else within creation—perhaps a job, a spouse, a child, maybe a politician, even a new pastor. It is work to trust in the Lord above all other things, and to love him with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

So when Jesus says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” all of those things are what he means to give us rest from. As Saint Augustine famously said, God made us for himself, and our hearts will therefore be restless until they rest in him.

So are you heavy laden in thinking about this world that your children and grandchildren are growing up in, this world that seems more bent on confusing and hurting children all the time, with destructive notions of gender and sex, with ideas about race that seem designed merely to bring division and hatred? Or any of the other hellish ideas that fill our world, that the weakest among us are most harmed by. If these are what you are heavy laden by, Jesus is telling you, you can come to me to find rest, for I love these little ones more than you, and I will always draw my own unto myself. And for those who harm my little ones, they will not escape my just judgment.

Are you heavy laden in thinking about the economic state of our country and the world, which to many of us seemed like what was early said about the Titanic, slow to turn but impossible to sink. After the shutdowns three years ago, now we know both to be untrue. Or maybe your concern has more to do with every major corporation, and almost every minor one, bowing the knee to the cult of pride month. Jesus is telling you, take my yoke upon you, for though you may be called into an economic desert for my name’s sake, I can make the desert be a blessing to you and your children. As he says elsewhere, “For whoever loses house or ... lands for my name’s sake will receive a hundredfold in this life, and will inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29).

Are you heavy laden in thinking about your relationship with God? Perhaps when you were younger you thought that your relationship with God would develop on its own. Or perhaps you used to have an intimacy with God, a constant knowledge of his presence with you, or you had a habit of prayer and Scripture reading that you have not maintained. Or perhaps you feel like a sheep without a shepherd, and you feel the burden of not having someone who is leading you and the flock here at Calvary. If so, Jesus is telling you, I am yet the Good and trustworthy Shepherd, learn from me and you will find rest for your soul. He never despises the one that comes to him in humility. He has no interest in rubbing your nose in your sins. He wants to give you rest, that rest that can only come from being in fellowship with him, from taking on his burden, from taking on his yoke.

But notice that Jesus doesn’t say that he will give rest by taking away all work. Instead, he gives you new work. He gives you a new yoke, his own yoke. A yoke is what held together two animals so that they could work together, so that they could pull a cart or pull a plow, or something else like that. The first thing to notice about this is that you are no longer working by yourself. You are working with Jesus, cooperating, working together with him. When God calls you to himself, he gives you good and worthy work to do. With Jesus, work and rest are not in opposition to one another, for he gives work that brings us to rest in him.

And what is this new work, this work that is rest at the same time? It is the work of knowing God. As Jesus had said in John chapter 6, “this is the work of God, to believe in him whom he has sent.” It is what Jesus had mentioned earlier in the reading from Saint Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus had said that no one knows the Son but the Father, and no one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. That might not have sounded like it at first, but this is the Gospel. For what Jesus is speaking about here is not just a mere head-knowledge. It is not merely knowing that God exists. Jesus is speaking of a kind of knowing that is of a different order altogether. It is much more like when Jesus said elsewhere, “This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Knowing God in this way, that is eternal life.

Why is this way of knowing God the same as having eternal life? Because this way of knowing God is the same as being included in God’s own inner life. What Jesus is speaking about is knowing the Father with Jesus. Another way of putting it is to say that we are included in Jesus’ own Sonship, his own relationship with his Father, and so we get to share in his own knowledge of his Father. That is why only the Son knows the Father, and vice versa. That is also why only the Son can reveal the Father.

And to you the Son has revealed his Father. Every time you hear his Word, Jesus is again making his Father known to you. And every time that you come forward to this table, he is again giving you his own life, which includes his relationship with his Father.

And so Jesus is telling you this morning, come to me, find me at this table, and find rest as you share in my love for my Father, for he is your Father too, to the glory of God, now and forever. Amen