

**A NEED TO REST AND A NEED TO DO - Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30**  
**The Eighth Sunday in Pentecost (Lectionary 14), July 6, 2008**  
**Calvary Lutheran Church, West Chester, PA + The Rev. Roy Almquist**

Our Gospel lesson for this morning contains some of the most encouraging words that Jesus ever spoke: *Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest* [Matthew 11: 28]. It is a comforting phrase that is often carved in panels in church sanctuaries or embroidered on wall hangings.

The words contain a **wonderful promise** that God will never leave us without support and solace when life gets difficult. These words bookend nicely with the assurance in Psalm 46: *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved* [Psalm 46, 1, 2].

The **earth has been moved** for many people during the past week and a half. The death of Casey Russo, a sixteen-year-old member of Calvary, and his friend Mike, in an automobile accident on June 23 has caused a heavy blanket of grief to descend on many who loved Casey, particularly his parents, his brothers, his relatives, and his friends. Casey's death is a source of corporate sadness for Calvary because this young man was baptized here, had his faith formed in our church schools, and was confirmed at our altar not many months ago.

Last Tuesday this sanctuary was filled as people gathered to diminish their grief in a time-honored fashion and to provide an opportunity for God to bring healing through the proclamation of the Gospel and the embrace of caring friends. I am sure there is something worse than burying a sixteen-year-old boy, but last Tuesday I could not think of what that might be.

We should not be surprised that as the years come and go people still seek out the comfort and hope that comes to us through Christian community. And this has nothing to do with age. Many teenagers were looking for help and healing on Tuesday. By coming to Calvary they came to the right place. For when we are frightened and confused we gravitate toward what we perceive to be an **external and timeless truth .. a promise that is greater than our weakness, a word of hope and encouragement in precisely the moments when we feel empty and inadequate.**

And, of course, it is not just in moments of **profound grief** that we feel *weary and heavy laden* .. the regular ebb and flow of life gets us there regularly. We cannot always provide what is needed, we regularly fail people who depend upon us, we are easily discouraged and we are not always the faithful friend and partner we want to be. How easy it is to feel over-matched in life's struggles and insignificant in our achievements. How much we need to hear those words of comfort, that offer of a place to rest and be renewed. Who does not from time to time long to lose himself or herself in the vastness of God?

But Jesus knew that **rest without work** was as difficult as **work without rest**. It is clear that the same God who gave the **gift of the Sabbath**, when all people in the land, as well as animals, were to cease work, also challenged people to serve those in need and to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

So I think it is fair to say that a full experience of the Christian life provides both a **need to rest** and a **need to do**. Hopefully we sense both of these needs in our lives. At any given time we may feel drawn more to one than the other, but both needs are legitimate. Our Lord understood this because immediately after his promise to those who are heavy-laden, *I will give you rest*, Jesus gives a challenge:

**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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.** [Matthew 11: 30]

Tradition holds that Jesus was not just a carpenter, but that he and his father Joseph specialized in wooden farming implements like plows, rakes, and **yoke** for oxen. So Jesus brought a clear understanding to those words, *Take my yoke upon you*. A properly designed and fitted yoke will not rub or distress the animals that wear them. Indeed, with the proper yoke, **the work becomes easier**. For that reason younger animals were often yoked with more experienced animals so that the work would be less difficult for both and the burden diminished.

Some twenty-five members of Calvary were yoked together this past week through their participation in the *Appalachian Service Project* in rural West Virginia. They went there not **for comfort**, but **for challenge** .. not **to rest** but **to do**. I know that they made a difference in the lives of those whom they helped, but I also have no doubt that the very act of helping others **has transformed the lives of all who went to West Virginia**. Never do we feel more alive than when we take someone else's burden upon our hearts.

Any Christian congregation that is committed to following in the footsteps of Jesus must realize that its members need both **holy rest** and **holy work**. **Piety** and **activism** should be present in all of our lives. We need to lose ourselves in God through worship, Bible Study and faith formation. But we also need to spend ourselves in some measurable way for the life of the world.

**What does this mean for you?** I cannot say, but I hope being a part of Calvary costs you more than an hour in this sanctuary and a few dollars in an offering envelope. I am glad that you are here this morning – anytime people are at worship on a holiday weekend, I am pleased. We have a better chance of touching your heart when you are here than when you are on the beach or drinking coffee at Starbucks on Sunday morning.

**I am happy that you came to church** this morning, but I am more concerned that **you become the church, the body of Christ, through your commitment and determination**. I pray that you are taking Christ's yoke upon you – that you are learning how to make a difference in the lives of others –

- that you are helping the homeless and the less-fortunate,
- that you are assisting new residents in our country learn English,
- that you are taking time to visit someone who is sick or alone or in grief.
- that you are investing some of your life in the task of forming the faith of children.

I pray that each of us will have **a faith sufficient** for the challenges we face, that we will achieve that wonderful balance between **being comforted and being yoked** for service. Above all may it be our prayer that God will empower us to live the **lives of courage and compassion** following the example that we find in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. AMEN.