

Good Friday – 2023

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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 11:28-30).

The Savior calls to you. The Son of God knows that every sinner is weary and burdened, weak and heavy laden. Rest; God gave us a day of rest. It's called the Sabbath. After six days, God rested from His labor of creation. It is finished. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:1-3). When God rested on the seventh day, He knew that He would provide rest for your soul. When God made man in His image, when God crafted Adam from the dust of the earth and Eve from one of Adam's ribs, God knew that His Son would bear a cross to Calvary. God knew that His Son would die.

God breathed into Adam the breath of life and Jesus gave up His Spirit, His breath. Humanity is created on Friday and humanity is recreated on Friday. Adam becomes a living creature on Friday and the Second, Greater Adam becomes a corpse on Friday. Come to me, and I will give you rest. Jesus is thoroughly familiar with irony. Looking at Good Friday and hearing of His suffering, how do you read His comment: “my yoke is easy and my burden is light?” There is no burden like His. There is no yoke like His suffering. What He bore is beyond measure. There is no entity like sin. What can be compared to this wretched evil? How would you measure the sum total of human depravity? How many murders have there been? How many adulteries and lies and words of hate and acts of physical cruelty and child abuse and theft of property or reputation? How does one measure lust and laziness and corruption and greed? The Lord Christ came to bear that burden and it was so. His Spirit was inflamed with man's sin and through it all Jesus remained truly God. Sin was fused to God's being and through it all Jesus remained truly man.

Come to me all who are heavy laden and I will give you rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light. This is what it took for God to give you rest – scourging, mockery, blasphemous hatred, hammer and spike, abandonment, hell's untempered assault. There is a marvel that takes place in your soul when you hear of our Lord's suffering. You become broken; hearing of what Jesus suffered by virtue of Him bearing our sin, dying to redeem us, we become broken. Broken by His love, broken by the pain of knowing that we contributed to His suffering; when we are broken we become supple. Supple; our soul is enlarged, enriched, and vibrantly alive with God's glory. The beginning of this service said that we, by our prayers, follow our Lord to Calvary. Yes; we follow our Lord to Calvary. Faith always follows our Lord. God makes us partakers of Christ. We share in His suffering. We share in His love. We share in His passion and death. My yoke is easy and my burden is light. No it isn't. When He bore it, it was not easy; the burden of the cross was not light; the burden of your sin was not light; the burden of dying for us all was not light.

But He gives it to you – His death – and it is nothing but life. For you, His yoke is nothing but easy. For you, His burden is nothing but light. Hope and a future, confidence and joy, relief from guilt, endowed with divine love – the fruit of this night is in you. You are a partaker of God's redeeming work. Like Simon of Cyrene bearing Jesus' cross, the Lord subdues to His service even our rebellious wills. We are partakers of Good Friday's astounding drama. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Doesn't living in this broken world make you heavy laden? Even the petty problems – gossip and insanity in the public square and freeways that either don't move or are something out of a Mad Max movie – we're heavy laden. Family members addicted to self or some other empty stimulant, income woes, disease, a guilty conscience that barks and hounds; we're heavy laden. Christ gives us rest. He makes us, He intentionally makes us, partakers of His passion, partakers of His suffering, partakers of His death. Christ gives us rest when the world and our sinful nature simply make us heavy laden.

In the Upper Room, Christ gave His disciples rest. Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Take, drink, this is my blood which is shed for you. True God and true Man, Jesus is Sabbath incarnate. He washed their feet and He gave them rest. He gave them a command to love each other as He has loved them. His image, His love, His nature – that is the rest which is in His disciples, in you. Come to me and delight yourself in the richest of food, the finest of wines, and you will find rest for your souls (Isaiah 55:1-2). Has your soul known rest in the forgiveness that He gives to you, an unqualified forgiveness which is full of restorative love, full of pure acceptance? Is not our altar a place where your soul knows rest? You examine yourself, God leads you to grieve over the evil you have done, and you come to Him here, at this altar. He feeds you His body and blood and you find rest for your soul. You are a partaker of Christ's divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

It's a victory – Jesus' death. It is a triumph of universal magnitude – Jesus' death. Humanity is vexed by calamitous enemies and none could stand up to them. We are too weakened by sin to marshal any resource to fend off death, to fend off Satan and hell. There is no rest in hell. There is no rest in Satan's domain. A frightful enemy has to be confronted. This is what it looks like – Jesus' back ripped open by scourging. Jesus crowned with soldier's mockery. Holy God stripped of all dignity as He endures an onslaught of evil's perversity – that's what it looks like. It is finished. The Son of God dies and it is pure victory. Victory, Triumph, Christ the King, Christ the Conqueror, Christ the Champion, Christ the Crucified – that's what it looks like. That's the victory you become a partaker of; that's the victory that gives you rest; that's the victory that saves your immortal soul. This victory breaks us; this victory makes our heart supple; this victory makes us alive. The sting of death penetrated Jesus' flesh. The Son of God died. That is the victory.

Jesus took His Sabbath rest in the tomb, a borrowed garden tomb, and there He was laid. The seventh day; after doing His recreating work on Good Friday, Jesus lay in Adam's tomb on the Sabbath. It was the end of the first creation. In Jesus' tomb, lay hidden the beginning of the second creation. His disciples were in anguish. His disciples were experiencing the opposite of rest. Death rules over us, they thought. Life has been vanquished. Truth has been vanquished. Hope had been vanquished. Our Lord is dead. They wept. Adam and Eve, as they were exiled from Eden – they wept. In slavery in Egypt, dying under the tyrannical hand of Pharaoh, the

Israelites wept. At the graveside of a loved one, we weep. At the graveside of a loved one, we are heavy laden. And Christ comes to us. With a Word of victory, Christ comes to us to comfort and to give our hearts rest. The disciples saw the Lord. After taking His Sabbath rest, Jesus rose on a new day, a Day that God made new, a day you live in now, a day that you will live in forever.

The King will say to His sheep, those have been washed in His blood, those who have been made partakers of His death and resurrection: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). And I will give you rest. For when I called you to take my yoke upon you, you believed in Me and you followed Me and you received the life I gave you. Enjoy the unending happiness of my Triumph. What is Mine is yours. That, my dear friends, is Good Friday. That is Christianity and heaven and this Divine Service. Come to Me, all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.