

Season after 
PENTECOST

Prayer

Collect of the Day

Gracious God, our heavenly Father, Your mercy attends us all our days. Be our strength and support amid the wearisome changes of this world, and at life's end grant us Your promised rest and the full joys of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 145:1-14 (antiphon v. 19)
Zechariah 9:9-12
Romans 7:14-25a
Matthew 11:25-30

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 699 *or* 684
Other Hymns – 832 (OT), 698 (E), 707 (E), 504 (G), 752 (G)

Our God and King, as once Your people received You in joy, open our hearts to rejoice in Your coming so that we may meet You in Your Word and Sacrament, for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. Help us to bless and extol Your name before the nations and to declare Your salvation to the generations to come, proclaiming that You are merciful and gracious and abounding in steadfast love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our merciful God and Lord, You are good to all Your creation. Continue to bless Your Church and to provide for her faithful pastors who will preach and teach Your Word and church workers who will serve us in Your name. Make bold our witness before the nations, and help us to act in love toward our neighbours. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our Creator and Lord, from You all things come and to You are all things directed. Provide for our nation faithful leaders who will hear and heed Your law, protect and defend the citizens, preserve the precious gift of liberty, and inspire us to use our freedom honourably. Make us mindful of the heritage our forebears have given to this land, and guide us to be faithful in our stewardship of all the resources You have provided. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our wise and giving God, You are the God of truth and in You is no falsehood or deception. Help us to delight in Your Law, to love what is good and true and right, and to seek after these things. Help us to wage war against the old Adam within us, restore us when we stray from Your Word, and forgive us when we give into the devil's temptations. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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Our compassionate Lord, we do not suffer alone the pain and afflictions of this life, but we live them out within Your grace and are sustained by Your mercy. Hear us on behalf of the sick, those who suffer, the grieving and those to whom death is near [*especially* _____]. According to Your will, deliver them from their afflictions and give to all Your strength, patience and hope, that they may endure to eternal life. Show compassion, and drive all pestilence from our land. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our loving Father, You have hidden Your greatness from our wisdom and made Your ways known to children. Guide us to bring our children to the waters of Baptism, to raise them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, and to know perfect rest and peace within Your loving arms. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our gentle God and Lord, You have invited us to come to You with the heavy burdens of this life, that we may find rest and peace in Your mercy. Grant relief to those who struggle, supply to those in need, hope to those who fear, and peace to those who are anxious, that we may be delivered from all adversity and brought to everlasting life, where we shall join the saints of old in Your presence forevermore. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, blessed Lord, we pray You to grant us according to Your merciful goodness and for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Season after **PENTECOST SERMON**

**SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
(Series A)**

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:25-30

“I Will Give You Rest”

I'm sure you've had those times in life when you've tried to do something, and you just couldn't get it right. It seemed so simple on the surface – fold flap A into slot B in order to put your child's Christmas present together late on Christmas Eve. But when there are finally no more parts to assemble, it doesn't look anything like the picture in the instructions. Or maybe you are cell phone challenged – hit this button and that photo will be sent to a friend, but again, nothing happens no matter how many buttons you push! Or maybe it's something mechanical – the broken toaster can be fixed if only this wire is connected to this lead, but nothing, except an unexpected huge spark.

It can often be difficult to get the results we expect or need to go forward. You try and try, but your efforts come to nothing but frustration. Being unable to accomplish these tasks can wear a person down, lower one's self-esteem, and in anger and frustration cause you to go to your driveway and use your vehicle to run over your cell phone, or take a baseball bat to your computer, toaster or whatever the offensive item is. That'll teach it! And then for the briefest of moments, as you hear the crack of plastic and the tinkle of glass, you are flooded with satisfaction . . . until you quickly realise how childishly you have been thinking and acting.

Now, you have to admit that these are fairly minor events. But what about the bigger, more important things that, try as we might, we can't solve on our own? What about those problems in your family: “Why can't we all just get along?” What about those strained relationships with your spouse: “Maybe if I buy her something, she'll treat me better!” What about those financial challenges that keep you from experiencing the so-called ‘good life’? Surely, financial freedom is only one lottery ticket away! What about that chronic illness that causes such pain – both emotionally and physically: “I must try to be a better person so that God will heal me.” Your problems make you feel as if someone has tied a huge, heavy

backpack over your shoulders. It weighs you down causing lots of frustration and anger. And in the end, you simply feel wretched and miserable. Some who reach this point even begin to contemplate why they should even go on living anymore.

Now, when it comes to our relationship to our God, many people – even you and me – experience that same kind of burden, that same miserable feeling that weighs us down. And it’s all because we think we can earn God’s favour by our good works and intentions. This is salvation by works of the Law. But attempting to be saved by what you do is like trying to accomplish something, but never attaining it. The Law tells you what you are to do, but never enables you to comply with its commands. Rather, it causes us more frustration, wondering if we’ve done enough. Sure, I didn’t physically hurt someone, but did I do all I could to keep them from being hurt by someone else? And the more we try to do what is right and fail, the more it leads us to despair. We experience tremendous weariness as we are burdened with more and more guilt and frustration.

That’s how the apostle Paul diagnosed our problem when he writes in Romans: *“For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . 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. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”* He then finally throws up his hands as if in total frustration as he exclaims: *“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me for this body of death?”*

We share the apostle’s constant struggle with sin, don’t we? We sit in church vowing to be better people. We pledge that this time we’re going to get it right! This time we’ll live the way we should! And we do, for maybe ten seconds, thirty seconds, or even a couple minutes. But then, just down the street someone cuts us off, and we sin in thought, word and deed! Or we desperately want to be a better spouse or parent; but when our moment comes to shine, we fall back into those same old, sinful habits.

No matter how hard we try, no matter how many well-intentioned resolutions to change we make, we just can’t change ourselves. We do things we know that we shouldn’t, and we don’t do things we know we should. And when we can’t stop the cycle, we throw up our hands and decide to just live with it . . . blaming someone else, or even blaming God for our predicament!

And into this reality, Jesus gently invites us: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* He also promises, *“My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”* Now, contrary to popular opinion, the Christian life is not about being a better person – and it never has been and never will be. In fact, you may recall that phrase made popular by Martin Luther, “Christians are at the same time sinner and saint.” And we experience true rest only as we see our Lord at work in that reality.

You see, when we sin, when we fall short and fail, we don't have to invest a ton of time and energy in trying harder, in being better. Anything that starts with us is doomed to failure. That burden, after all, all that trying, has all been carried and borne for us by Jesus. When He went willingly to Calvary's cross, His heavenly Father placed on Him the entire burden, the yoke, of your sin and mine . . . indeed, the sins of all humanity.

Now, a yoke is a wooden collar that links two oxen to a stone which they pull in order to grind the wheat. Or, a yoke can link two oxen to a plow in order to till a field. Jesus, through His holy, sinless life wore the yoke of obedience – a yoke that when we try to wear it, feels to us like being trapped in a vicious cycle. But His perfect obedience, His perfect keeping of every Law, is now given to us and counted as ours. No longer are we guilty of those many sins we commit, for Jesus has taken our place, paying for it once-and-for-all.

As a result of our Saviour's great love for us, we now have rest from our burden of sin and all the problems of life. That rest comes to us as we wear the yoke of Christ in faith, by believing in Him. We now see how it feels – that yoke of Christ – how little it weighs . . . how easy it is to carry because Jesus has already carried the load and burden of our sin for us. We don't have to try, and try, and try again . . . becoming more frustrated each time we fail to keep God's Law. No longer is our sin a burden that keeps us tossing and turning through another sleepless night, thinking, 'If only I'd done this, or not said that!'

Rather, we are loved by our heavenly Father, not because of what we've done, can do, or ever will do. No, we are loved by God for He has marked us with water and the Word of Holy Baptism. He invites us to come with empty hands to His Table in order to receive His body and blood in the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Yes, we are loved by God – not because we try harder or get it right this time, or even because we might get it right next time; but because of what Jesus has already done for us. He has died our death. And by His resurrection from the dead He promises that all who believe in Him – yes, believe, not do things – will rise from the dead and join Him for an eternity in the kingdom of heaven.

Living in the shadow of Christ's cross and empty tomb, we do have rest. But we don't just sit and do nothing. Rather, we put ourselves back under God's Law and try to follow His commands. Of course, when we fail, as we will, we receive abundant forgiveness from His gracious hand. And our Lord is always here to graciously give us rest from our daily struggles, rest from our sin, rest forever with Him in heaven. Amen!