

**+ Matthew 11:25-30 + The Secret to Real Rest + 5th Sunday after Pentecost +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 9 July 2017 +**

We all need rest. A couple years ago, a study¹ came out revealing that only about 1 in 7 Americans wake up feeling rested every day of the week. According to the survey they conducted, only about 15% of Americans wake up every morning during the week feeling rested. About 40% of Americans wake up one to three times a week feeling tired and poorly rested, while 38% say that they wake up poorly rested four times or more a week. As of the other 7%, they didn't say. The big reason for all that lost rest? People aren't getting enough sleep. That's a lot of lost sleep!

Now before you start dozing off because of your own lack of sleep, why is it that so many people don't get enough rest?² It might be health-related—like a sleep disorder or another medical condition. It might be diet-related—too much caffeine or sugar or eating too close to bedtime. It might be work-related if your hours are always changing or if your job requires you to be available any time night or day. It might be failure to disconnect before bedtime—turning off the television, ending the game, or disconnecting from social media and allowing your mind and body to wind down before you go to sleep. Or perhaps we're simply following the lead of a culture that takes sleep for granted as wasted time, a culture that often views taking time to rest as time poorly spent—unless you're on some luxurious vacation or amazing getaway.

...But what happens when we don't get enough rest not just for our bodies and minds, but also for our souls? We burn out because we've been trying to burn the candle on both ends. Our minds aren't as sharp. Our emotions aren't kept in check, and our sinful natures can get the better of us because our guard is down. We're left exhausted physically, mentally, and spiritually.

We all need rest, but where can we find rest? What's the secret to real rest? Attempts to answer that question have become big business! People promise that their product will reveal that secret to you, and you won't wake up feeling tired and poorly rested anymore. Just purchase their white noise machine or their scientifically designed pillows or sleep aids or their expensive mattress that can be adjusted to your personal sleep level or your preferred sleeping position.

Now some of those products can actually help you sleep better. They can help you get better physical rest, but they can only go so far when the reason for your restlessness is not physical, when the reason for your exhaustion is stress, worry, anxiety, or uncertainty. Have you ever gone to sleep exhausted, enjoying the escape of sleep, only to wake up and realize that you had to come back to reality—and reality isn't so great? Sometimes we treat vacations like that. It's an escape. Maybe you actually get some rest for your body and mind, but then you have to come back to real life. Stress with your job, with your family life, with your finances, with health issues has been known to rob you of rest. Mix into that an unhealthy dose of anxiety, worry, and uncertainty...and rest is fleeting.

...But we're not just faced with physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion—restlessness that we feel. No, a rest disorder that afflicts every person is spiritual restlessness. The North African teacher Augustine once wrote a simple prayer about that restlessness, **“...Lord, our heart is restless until it rests in you.”** Isn't that true? If finding the secret to the best physical rest is big business, you could say the same thing about finding the secret to the best spiritual rest. How many books, seminars, workshops, videos, and experts promise to help you find spiritual peace, yet they leave you still feeling restless? How much money is spent on trying to find inner peace, to get in touch with your spirituality, to make use of ancient disciplines of meditation—none of which have any connection to the true God or his Word, but yet you return to real life and that spiritual restlessness returns too? How often does all that time, money, and effort leave you only feeling more burdened with guilt because you haven't found that so-called “peace” or “rest” they promised?

We all need rest, but will we ever find the secret to real rest? The people in the crowds gathering around Jesus wondered the same thing. You see, people were flocking to Jesus because they needed rest. I can't tell you how well they slept, but even if they were well-rested physically, they were still spiritually weary, worn-out, burned-out, exhausted, and burdened.

Their restless souls had searched for solutions to real rest. They had tried to find peace in their work, in their families, in their communities, but they found no peace in those things. So they went to their religious experts—teachers who should know the secret to real rest. Yet when those soul-weary people tried to find the solution to

¹ <https://today.yougov.com/news/2015/06/02/sleep-and-dreams/>

² <https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/files/pdfs/Common-Causes-Inadequate-Sleep.pdf>

their weariness, those religious experts only piled on guilt. “If you really want to find rest in the Lord, you need to obey his will. You need to be pleasing in his sight by doing this, this, this, and that, plus about 300 more tasks we have for you. Only then you might have peace with God. Only then you might achieve real rest.” The heavy burden of guilt crushed down on their already weary shoulders.

So if that’s what their rabbis, their religious experts were telling them, then why gather around Jesus—another teacher of the Bible, another rabbi? He was different. He had already brought relief to countless physically weary souls—healing people who had struggled for years with physical ailments or illnesses. He cast out demons that plagued them and even raised the dead!

...But it wasn’t just his miraculous healings. No, from the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus didn’t teach like the experts. Jesus didn’t simply regurgitate the wise and pithy sayings of other rabbis or other teachers of the Law. He simply taught the Word of God. He spoke the Word of God. He was much more like the prophets of the Old Testament than the religious experts of his time, speaking the Word on God’s behalf, but even then, Jesus was different. Unlike the prophets, he could speak as God himself. He didn’t impose more burdens on those weary souls. He revealed to them the secret to real rest for their souls.

That’s what we find Jesus doing in our reading. **“I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, because this was your good pleasure.”** “Lord, I praise you because you’ve hidden your secret from those who think they are wise and intelligent, and instead you’ve revealed that secret to little kids, even infants who know very little! That’s what you wanted to do!” Back in Jesus’ day, the search for real, spiritual rest was big business just like it is today. Follow the right spiritual expert. Do the right spiritual discipline, and you’ll discover the secret—or so they promised. In reality, souls grew weary carrying around a big burden of guilt.

Yet Jesus praised his heavenly Father because God had revealed his secret not to the experts, but to little ones, even infants. How could Jesus say that infants knew God’s secret better than experts? Those little ones knew him. They knew Jesus as their moms and dads brought them to Jesus to be blessed; as they taught their children from little on about the Messiah who would save his people; as they sang psalms of finding rest in God their Savior. **“I am at rest in God alone...Rest in God alone, my soul, for my hope comes from him.”** (Psalm 62:1,5) Those little ones didn’t need to go through spiritual gymnastics to find real rest. Jesus gave it to them as they fell asleep with complete trust in him and their parents who loved them.

For those who think they need an expert or anyone who thinks they know better, Jesus has a simple reminder of the authority given to him. **“All things have been entrusted to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son desires to reveal him.”** Jesus alone has the authority to reveal that secret of real rest for your soul, he is your all-powerful Savior who in love reveals his Father to you.

That’s why Jesus could reveal his secret to us, to weary, worn-out, burned-out, exhausted souls. **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”** The secret to real rest is Jesus. With open arms, Jesus calls to you weighed down with stress and worry and uncertainty and anxiety over your health, your job, your finances, your family, your life, and he says, **“Come to me!** Come to me with all that leaves your soul so restless, so weary and exhausted, so crushed with guilt, and find real rest in me. Find rest in me for your burned-out, worn-out soul. This is no fake-fronted promise. There is no man hidden behind the curtain like the Wizard of Oz. I have the authority to give that rest to you directly from your heavenly Father, and I willingly give that rest to you! Find in me the burden-lifting forgiveness you need for your soul. Find in me the burden-lifting peace you need to calm your troubled heart. Find in me the burden-lifting rest you need to make it through today and every day. Find in me what you won’t find anywhere else—real rest for your soul.”

...But, Jesus, didn’t you just tell me that I still have to bear a yoke? Isn’t that just like everyone else who claims to have the secret to real rest? Isn’t that just another burden? How does Jesus answer that? **“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** “You don’t have to be afraid of my yoke. The yoke of God’s holy law and all those extra burdens from others or your own impossible expectations—those were heavy, those crushed your soul, but my yoke is easy. It doesn’t even move the scale. I’ve taken all those burdens of my Law, and I’ve put them on my own shoulders. I’ve lived under that yoke of the Law, even facing the curse of that Law—death, so you by faith could stand unburdened before God. My yoke is that I have rescued you not because you’ve earned it, but because I love you. That heavy Law has been replaced with the easy yoke of the good news that I saved you. So in me you find real rest for your soul.”

We all need rest, and the secret to real rest is Jesus, our Sanctuary. That's an interesting word, isn't it? Ever wonder why we call this room the *sanctuary*? A sanctuary is not a particularly sacred space around the altar where only a few can go. A sanctuary is a place of refuge, a place of safety, a place where you can breathe more easily, a place where you can rest from the craziness of your life. As Jesus calls us to find rest in him, we find sanctuary in him.

You find Jesus your Sanctuary in his Word, when you spend time with him unburdening your soul of all that's weighing you down, and you find rest for your weary soul. You find Jesus your Sanctuary in his Supper, when he lays out for you the best meal ever, a meal that revives and restores you, a meal of himself for you, and you find rest for your weary soul. We find Jesus our Sanctuary when we come together for worship gathered around Word and Sacrament, so here in this sanctuary you find rest for your weary soul.

We all need rest, and the secret to real rest is Jesus. You find that secret in his Word. You find that secret in his Supper. You find that secret in Jesus. So what's holding you back from enjoying real rest in Jesus? ***"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*** Amen.