



## **Jesus Gives Us Rest!**

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Words are funny, aren't they? Many times, we don't mean literally what we are saying with the words we are using. For instance, have you ever said, "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse"? Have you said it? But have you ever actually done it? When they were young, my sons loved it and laughed when I would say, "Time to hit the road!" On occasion, they would actually run outside to our street and hit the road with their fists.

So how about this one: "Sick and tired"! Have you ever said it? Have you ever felt it? Are you feeling sick and tired right now? When you are sick and tired of something, does that mean you are vomiting and have a fever from it? When you are sick and tired of something, you are not literally ill, but you are frustrated, worn, and weary by some ongoing issue or problem.

How many people at this very moment are sick and tired of the ongoing pandemic? How many people are sick and tired of the tension and dissension regarding every little decision, such as whether to wear a

mask or not to wear one? How many people are sick and tired of waiting and waiting and waiting, wondering when this will ever end, when we can go back again to what life was before this pandemic came along to whack us?

Are you worn and weary from this ongoing pandemic? Have you gotten tired of hearing all the talk about coronavirus waves, when all you would rather think about this fall is the waves of the wondrous seashore or the lovely lakeshore? We are indeed sick and tired of the endless coronavirus. And the whole thing is far from over. Are you worn and weary from all of it?

In reality, you could ask that same query about any ongoing problem in your life. For all life's lingering problems, God gives us the answer—Jesus. Jesus is the one we can turn to, and need to turn to, with all of our problems. So, have you been turning to Jesus? Have you been finding your rest in Him?

Jesus proclaims, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). Jesus tells us further, **“I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:29). Do you rest in Jesus? When you are weary of the world in which we live, do you find your rest in Jesus? What does this even mean?

Where do we find our rest? Too often, when we have stressors and “distressors” in life, we turn to the substances of this life to try to relieve our stress. You all are very familiar, I'm sure, with the term “emotional eating”—maybe you even are personally familiar with the practice of emotional eating. You may likewise be familiar with the practice of emotional drinking, using that drink to cope when you're on the brink of tossing in the towel. God tells us we don't need substances to cope with life's problems and pressures. We need Jesus, the One in whom we can find true rest. Those substances will only give you a momentary assist as you address your problems, and generally they will give you other,

greater problems to boot. Jesus will give you an eternal assist for all your problems, and relying on Him will make you even stronger than you were apart from Him.

Do you rest in Jesus? Will you rest in Jesus? Maybe you're familiar with the practice of resting when you are in court. The attorney may say, "I rest my case." Well, for every single case we encounter in life—every single problem or issue that we encounter in life—we can find rest in Jesus Christ. Jesus proclaims in our Gospel today, "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28).

I've told my congregation about the children's sermon by the pastor who was asking the kids a question about what lives in a tree and stores nuts and a kid replied, 'Well, pastor, it sounds like a squirrel, but since the answer is usually Jesus, I'm going to go with that.' Jesus is not always literally the answer to every question. For example, what do you use to change a tire? Jesus is, however, spiritually and in reality, the answer to every single problem in life.

We're facing a big problem right now as we keep going through this pandemic. How do we survive it? How do we keep from going crazy from the uncertainty? How do we handle the stress? Jesus is the answer. We can rest in Him, find our strength in Him. We can keep going through Him, endure and persevere through Him. We can find our rest in Jesus.

So, what does it mean to rest in Jesus? Well, there are two ways to rest. One way to rest is simply to take a break from all your labor. Certainly Jesus gives that to us. One way He does so is in worship, as we are strengthened through His Word and Sacrament. Remember on the seventh day after God's six days of work in His creation, God Himself rested, setting a pattern for us and showing to us the importance of rest. So, rest in Jesus truly means taking time to worship Jesus and to bask in the beauty of His Word.

But another way to rest is to be at peace and at ease knowing you've got what you need. As a student during my nine years of graduate school, four at seminary and five for my PhD, I would have fellow students who would not be at rest about an upcoming test. Quite often, it would be because they had not put in the time to study and to prepare properly. They were quite anxious to take that test. I was generally quite pumped to take that test. Why? I had studied hard, I had read and reread, I had taken many notes, I had inwardly digested what I had been learning. I was pumped up to go show what I learned, like an athlete who wants to compete to show what their training has done for them.

A weightlifter who has strength from working out doesn't get worked up about doing a pump. He knows he's got the muscle mass to do it, to lift that big unit. A runner who has trained for an event doesn't get stressed out about running a race. She knows she has the stamina to go the distance.



You have Jesus in you. He gives you His stamina, so you can go the distance. Through Him, you can do it!

Remember what Paul proclaims in Philippians 4:13? **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"**

Have you heard somebody say, "I don't know if I can do this, keep coping with this coronavirus?" Have you yourself felt like that or even said that? You CAN do it! Jesus is with you to sustain you and to give you rest in Him.

In Psalm 55:4-6, when David was enduring a truly trying time, David wrote, **"My heart is in anguish within me ... O that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest! I would flee far away to the desert."** Do you ever feel like that?

Do you wish you could fly away to get away from it all, so you could find rest from all the stress? That was David's hope, and sometimes it's ours. But it's not always the answer. For instance, during coronavirus you may not want to go away because traveling may increase your chances of catching the virus. And God's answer isn't always taking away our problems—it's giving us the One who gives us rest and strength to cope with our problems! Jesus proclaims, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”** (Matthew 11:28). As we rest in Christ's Word, like we do in worship, Jesus gives us hope to cope and strength to endure and persevere.

Friends, we will get through this pandemic. We can survive and even thrive. And why? Will we get through this because we are such great people? No, although you truly are all wonderful people. Will we get through this because we as a nation are so great, the United States? No, although if you're like me, you do thank God for our country. Why will we get through this? How can I say this?

And how can I say it not just with hope, but with certainty and conviction? We will get through this because we have the Almighty God with us! He promises to never leave us, He promises to strengthen and sustain us. He gives us the wondrous Jesus, in whom we find rest, and in whom we find strength to cope with life's stress and distress.

Just as Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount encouraged us to look to the birds who do not worry about how their needs will be met but trust their Heavenly Father, we are called on to trust Him, too. Continuing with that theme of the birds, I'd like to share with you another Word from the Lord. **“Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint”** (Isaiah 40:31). Remember those words? Now I've heard different opinions on how well eagles actually soar and how much strength they actually have, but the point of

the verse still applies. When you rest in Jesus, you will soar and have stamina. If you rest in your own strength, you will not.

Haven't we all been experiencing this during these days of the pandemic? When we have tried to cope with this craziness with the strength that is in each of us, we just can't muster the luster we need. But when we turn to Jesus and the strength He gives us, we not only can keep plugging along, we can be strong.

Think about what Jesus did when He gave His life on the cross. He paid the price for your sins with His own holy and precious blood. And after He did that, in essence He rested. He looked up to His Father in heaven and said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." His body was placed in the tomb, where He rested for three days in anticipation of His resurrection.

Jesus loves you and gave Himself for you. Surely He is with you to give you what you need to get through. For the times we've tried to find our rest and relief in places other than Him, He took our place under God's wrath and paid the price for all of that. He died and won forgiveness for you. After completing His work and resting in the earth, Jesus emerged to bring you new birth. When you are born again, you are made a new person in Him. A person who doesn't have to find rest in what this world offers, which really won't keep you rested but may just cause other problems instead. Through Christ, we can find true rest.

Remember the saying, "Everything I really need to know I learned in kindergarten"? Well, in many ways we could say, everything I need to know I learned from Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible and who—other than Jesus—the Scriptures call the greatest prophet. We think we have it bad. Think about Moses, leading those vast hordes of



people for the Lord, facing off against ferocious Pharaoh, leading people who were finding their rest in things that were evil. Remember in the desert, when the people were feeling worn and weary by how long they had been wandering? Remember in the desert, when the people were looking back to how things had been prior to what they were enduring and were longing for those days to come back again? Remember in the desert, when the people were feeling a lack of rest, and so they tried to find their rest in something quite ludicrous, building a golden calf and worshipping it?

So, there was Moses, perturbed and plagued by all of that. He turned to the Lord in frustration and said to the Lord, “You have been telling me lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.” What was Moses saying? What you might say today as you face the coronavirus and feel all alone and outpowered? Moses was saying, “Lord, I can’t take this, I can’t do this, I can’t make it on my own.”

Remember what God said to Moses? Remember God’s answer? The Lord replied, “**My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest**” (Exodus 33:14). Look carefully at your English translation and you should see that when God says, “My Presence will go with you,” the words “My” and “Presence” are both capitalized. This is a proper noun! This proper noun, a name for God Himself, is reminding us of the proper response to all of life’s problems—to remember that God is with us. When we are in the desert of life, He will not desert us.

When I was in college, I took the class Desert Biology. We learned some wonderful things. I remember how much I enjoyed writing my research paper on the horned toad. One point I remember from that class is the climatological components of a desert. We often think of a desert as hot and dry, but in terms of climate, it is a place of vast variation of extreme conditions. It gets drastically hot in the day and can cool down

dramatically at night. The average daytime high is 100, the average night-time low can be 25, so a difference of 75 degrees—quite extreme.

Moses was in a literal desert, experiencing those extremes. Amidst those extremes, when Moses thought he couldn't take it, God told Moses that he could make it. God told Moses that He, the Present God, was all that Moses needed. **“My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest”** (Exodus 33:14). Moses could rest in God and keep going. We are in a metaphorical desert, experiencing extreme conditions at this moment, amidst the long-lasting pandemic. God tells us He is all we need. We can find our rest in Jesus. The proper response to life's extreme conditions? Listen, it's simply this: to find our rest in Jesus.

And since that's the proper response, this is also a proper place for me to say, “I rest my case!”