

*Listening to Jesus*  
**Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**July 5, 2020**

**Text: Matthew 11:25-30 (ESV)**

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.

General George C. Marshall was one of the most decorated military leaders in the history of our country. General Marshall was named Chief of Staff when World War II began. He helped devise Operation Overlord—the codename for Normandy Invasion on D-Day. After the war he came out of retirement to serve as President Truman’s Secretary of State. His economic recovery program for Europe became known as the Marshall Plan and he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953. George Marshall has this formula for handling people: 1) Listen to the other person's story; 2) Listen to the other person's full story; and, 3) Listen to the other person's full story first.

Our theme today is *Listening to Jesus*. We do well to follow General Marshall’s advice when listening to Jesus, and so, to paraphrase, that would be to 1) Listen to Jesus; 2) Listen to Jesus’ full story; and, 3) Listen to Jesus’ full story first. Too often we either refuse to listen to Jesus or listen to only the part that we want. Let’s listen to Jesus in our text today to see what He has to teach us about ourselves, what we need, and how He provides what we truly need—rest for our souls.

Our text begins with one of those awkward phrases, “At that time . . . .” That just begs for us to know what was going on that leads Jesus to speak these words. We see that many people had rejected the ministry and message of John the Baptist, who was in prison for being a faithful preacher, and now many were rejecting Jesus Himself. The questions that naturally arise are “Has something gone wrong? Who is in charge here? Why is God not at work?”

“Has something gone wrong? Who is in charge here? Why is God not at work?” Why do we continue to suffer and have life disrupted by this viral pandemic? What’s happening to our country? Why all this unrest and violence? Why all this hatred? Why are there so many struggles in my family? We used to all get along. Now there is in-fighting, jealousy, and relationships are broken. Personally, one bad thing seems to happen to me after another. Who is in charge here? Why is God not at work?

What do we hear as Jesus responds? In our text we see Jesus then praising His Father, because even though those who were “wise and understanding” in their own judgment rejected Jesus, still the Father was pleased to reveal that Jesus had come to be Savior to “little children”.

“Little children” here is equal in meaning to those Jesus referred to as “the poor in spirit” when He said in His Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). “Little children” here has nothing to do with age or size. It means those who recognize accept what God says about their sinfulness and their absolute need for God’s grace, forgiveness, and saving authority. “Little children” recognize their complete dependence upon God. These receive God’s blessing, His gifts. Jesus praises His Father that while there are many who are not believing and rejecting His saving message and work, yet, God is at work. We in faith too rejoice as God gives us faith to see we are not wise and understanding in ourselves, but we need God to teach us through Jesus our Savior.

Yes, we struggle because of what is going on in our world and in our own lives. We are anxious, worried, frightened, and we make sinful decisions and reach wrong conclusions about God and about life unless we first listen to Jesus. God is at work. As we humbly repent of our sins—as we first let God turn us from ourselves--then He can turn to Jesus—then, we are able to hear God’s word of forgiveness for us.

Listening to Jesus, we learn that He comes and invites us to come to Him in our every need. “Come,” says Jesus. “Come to all who labor and are heavy laden.” Our sin only brings more hurt and heartache upon ourselves. How can we deal with that? We can’t, but as the hymn writer classically wrote “What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.” Jesus bears our load! Jesus is calling us daily to a fresh start and a new beginning by His grace. Come to Him.

Listening to Jesus, coming to Him, what do we hear? We hear Jesus teach us that He will give us rest. The “rest” of which Jesus speaks is forgiveness. Jesus lifts the burden of our sin from us and comforts us in the assurance that no matter what our struggle in life, Jesus is with us to care for us—if we will but hear and trust what He teaches in His Word.

Listening to Jesus, we hear Him say that this “rest” is a rest for our “souls.” “Soul” here whole being of a person; “soul” here refers to both body and spirit. Sin affects us spiritually but sin also affects us physically. The clearest demonstration of that is we die. “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20). But sin affects us physically in so many ways. Have you ever felt cornered by a chain of events that appeared to back you deeper and deeper into a situation from which you could see no escape? Have you ever felt on the verge of panic as you faced choices which seemed to offer you only varying degrees of disaster? Have you ever lain awake at night burdened by a troubled heart because you feel so inadequate, so much a failure? You are a troubled “soul”, troubled in both spirit and body.

Jesus knows! Jesus says, “Come to Me!” Jesus says “Learn from Me!” What does He teach us? What do we learn? He teaches us that He is gentle and lowly in heart [or “humble in heart”]. Jesus teaches us here that He receives and forgives all who come to Him in need. Forgiven, we then also find rest in our struggles because we know God is with us even in dark times. That is why we can hold with absolute confidence in our Bible Memory verse we have before us now in July: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This is an amazing promise, a promise that calls for faith, because through the shadows and even darkness of our heartache and tears, we can’t see how God will work it for good. The promise is sure for us because of Jesus. Jesus is able to deliver on all God’s promises because of the humility of His own heart that led Him to the cross to humble Himself even to the point of death for you. Listen and learn from Jesus that by His death He destroyed even the power of death and the grave. You need fear no evil. What a wonderful rest for us in Jesus!

Listen to Jesus. He says “Take my Yoke upon you, and learn from Me.” The yoke—so, picture this--a yoke is a wooden crosspiece fastened to two animals’ necks, who then walk together in order to pull a plow or a cart that’s attached to that yoke. The yoke is heavy, it's confining. Jesus pictures a farm animal's burden, but wants us to think of all the different kinds of yokes that put us under the pressure of performance and measuring up to earthly demands. We can’t pull that on our own.

Listen to Jesus. The essence of taking Jesus’ yoke is learning what He is like and what He does for us. Jesus loves us and has carried all our sins and sorrows to the cross. Jesus’ forgiveness, presence, and care lightens every load. Jesus calls us to walk beside Him as He carries the load for us. He makes our part “easy” and our burden “light.” He’s got us!

A teacher read to her class the verses from Matthew that contains the phrase “My yoke is easy.” Then she asked the class, “Who can tell us what a yoke is?” One little boy said, “It is something you put on the necks of animals.” When the teacher asked, “What is the yoke that God puts on us?” a girl responded, “It’s God wrapping His arms around our necks.”

That is a picture of the relationship God gives on His own gracious terms in Jesus Christ. He alone really refreshes. In Him is all you need. No matter what is happening in your life right now, He has real rest for the weary, rest, right now, for you, in Him by faith in the name of Jesus! Amen.

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