

How To Find Rest

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[0 : 00] O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. In your Gospel according to St. Matthew today, I want you to turn to where we left off last Sunday, which is the end of the 11th chapter, and particularly through chapter 11, verse 28 following.

And there you will see the invitation with which I began the service, the invitation which will come again at the center of our communion service, the invitation around which this sermon is to be preached, and the invitation which I hope you'll go home with the invitation very much fixed in your mind.

And here it is. Come to me, all you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, put it on you, and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest.

For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light. It would probably be helpful in order to understand the radical nature of this invitation if you notice one or two things about it.

First, that central to the invitation is the person who issues it, the Lord Jesus Christ, that he is very much at the center of the invitation.

[1 : 42] And if you were to take a pencil and a circle in that text, Matthew 11, 28 to the end of the chapter, the number of times it says, I, my, and me, you will see how central is the person of Christ.

He says, come to me, learn from me, take my yoke, take my burden, I will give you rest, I am meek, gentle at heart.

So that he is very central to the invitation, and he is inviting people to come to him. The second thing about the invitation, that it is very much involved something in terms of whether or not you are going to accept it.

And my hesitation in preaching about this this morning is that in a sense, I am announcing this invitation, and putting you in the position where you must either accept it or in some measure accept it.

Such is true whenever anybody preaches, but it's particularly true when it's focused on an invitation like this. You are invited to cease from labor, to lay down a burden, to become a disciple or learner of Jesus Christ and from Jesus Christ.

[2 : 57] You are invited to be given a rest and to be yoked to Christ. So it's an invitation that's going to involve you completely.

Now, what I am concerned about, and this has very much to do with my involvement with you here at St. John Shaughnessy, is that can we, in the midst of all that we are doing as a congregation, in the midst of all our structures, confirmation classes, church committees, guilds, services, choirs, servers, sidesmen, and all that's happening of an organizational way, all the money we need to raise in order to keep this church going from year to year, all the programming we have to do to make the best use of the parish hall, all the interactivities between people of various ages and various interests.

In the center of all that is this invitation from Jesus Christ coming through clearly. Do you recognize this invitation at the center of it all or not?

I am particularly concerned about the confirmation class. I am very anxious that their confirmation should mean that they have heard this invitation and are accepting this invitation.

But I can't seem to put it to them in so many words so that they will understand exactly what I mean. So I tell them about the Ten Commandments and about the Lord's Prayer and about the Church Catechism and about the articles and about the history and about how to behave themselves at the Holy Communion.

[4 : 43] And I tell them about the history of the Bible and various things like this. We're trying to teach them in different ways. But in the midst of it all, I don't want them to say, Well, I now know the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and am instructed in the Church Catechism.

Therefore, I want to be confirmed. In the midst of it all, I want them to hear this invitation, which is a very personal invitation from Christ to them as persons, and that their confirmation should be, in a very real way, their response to that invitation.

But it's not an easy thing to do. It's not an easy thing to communicate. Because they, like the rest of us, have a certain expectation of what's involved in confirmation, and they're trying to respond to that.

And the reality and the dynamic of it sometimes escapes them as it sometimes escapes us. I want you for a moment to make a comparison between this invitation and the invitation which most people hear when they're invited to take some part in the life of the Church.

The kind of invitation that the Church seems to be extending is this. That we have an enormous amount of work that has to be done around here, and most of it's drudgery, but if you want to earn some points towards getting into heaven, you'd be well to take it seriously.

[6 : 14] You go and you ask people, and unfortunately you are going and asking people to work, whose main problem in life is that they are already overworked before you ever came along, and you ask them to do more.

That doesn't make sense to me. You go to people who are using the Church to build their little kingdoms, and you ask them to do something, and of course it depends whether or not they're prepared to give up the building of their little kingdom in order to take part in something else.

And lots of people use the Church to build kingdoms, little kingdoms of their own. It's human nature. You wouldn't expect it not to happen.

It happens in every other aspect of human life. So what happens here? When you invite people, you often stir up the latent resentment that a lot of people have who have in the course of their life been hurt by the Church.

So that instead of them being able to take on this invitation, all you're doing is stirring the coals of past resentments. Sometimes when you issue the invitation to become involved in the life of Church, you're asking people who really need something done for them.

[7 : 34] And they're perhaps not willing to allow that to be done for them. And so what you're doing is asking them to do something more and further hide or bury their own needs.

You very often choose people who can't say no. They've never learned to say no. They haven't either the capacity or the time or the energy to do a good job, but they still won't say no.

And so they become involved in trying to answer the invitation that the Church gives. You can very often appeal to people's guilt feelings because all of us have an enormous amount of guilt that we have to contend with.

And if by doing some petty drudgery in the Church, we can in some way get rid of some of our guilt feelings, it might be worthwhile. But that invitation is really taking advantage of people.

I don't think it's helping them by expecting them to work out their guilt feelings at the Church. You very often, by inviting people to do something, take people who are at the threshold of their stress level where they can't take any more, and you come along and make an invitation to them, and that just takes their stress level to the breaking point because they can't take on any more activity.

[9 : 00] You're asking people to work with people whom they have no relationship with, and that often is much harder than you expect. So this invitation keeps coming from the Church, and people keep rejecting it for lots of good reasons.

You often are asking people to work in a structure that has no profit motive. And I don't say this with any sneering attitude, but profit certainly inspires us to work, doesn't it?

I mean, we're prepared to put in long hours and expend a lot of energy if there is some tangible profit at the end of it. And our society is orientated this way.

And more and more, things which used to be done on an entirely voluntary basis are now done with profit in mind. And we simply recognize that that's the way the world works.

And when you suddenly confront somebody who lives in that kind of world 24 hours a day and say, would you like to spend 10, 12 hours a week doing this, it strikes them as being somewhat ridiculous.

[10 : 12] And understandably so. Very often when the Church issues an invitation, they're applying deliberate pressure to people who are already under too much pressure.

And one of the results of these Church invitations to do things is that people get to the point where they feel they've done all that could be expected of them.

They've put in as much time as they should put in. They've undertaken as many jobs as they could be expected to undertake. And now's the time for the payoff. And so they wait till the payoff comes.

Probably not in this world, but they hope in the next. And so that kind of invitation, I think, is categorically rejected by many, many people.

And quite understandably so. That's the invitation they hear the Church giving. And when people come to me like young couples wanting to get married and I invite them to become part of the Church, they consider that to be an unwarranted intrusion on their freedom.

[11 : 26] When people come to bury their dead and I invite them to share in the life and faith of the Church, they consider that they're under sufficient stress at the moment without having to get involved in whether they believe in God or the life you're after or anything like that.

And quite understandably so. Because what the Church seems to be inviting people to do all the time is to go beyond the capacity that they have to go beyond their reason and intelligent awareness of what they're capable of doing and to do even more than they're capable of doing.

so that there is this terrible contrast between the invitation that the Church extends to people and the invitation which Christ extends to people.

And what are the unique characteristics of the invitation that Christ extends? But I think there's one word in this invitation which marks the difference.

And he says, Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. So often the Church doesn't offer rest to anybody.

[12 : 48] A place of rest. It's interpreted, I will refresh you. Does the Church offer a place where you can find refreshment and renewal?

I think that going to California or Hawaii or the Caribbean or any other place to take a rest is really a delusion that we maintain because if you can't rest here you probably can't rest there anyway.

And the only thing that happens is it's a lovely change. And I'm in favor of it. But I think in the radical sense of rest it very often is not that.

It's just another kind of activity in which there is no basic rest. But Christ speaks about rest.

And that I think the reason that he invites us in the midst of life in which most of us feel that we are laboring and are heavy laden that an invitation to find rest is an invitation that we need to consider seriously.

[14 : 02] There needs to be a place of rest built into our everyday life. There needs to be a place of rest built into our relationships.

There needs to be a place of rest built into every job that we do. And of course rest doesn't mean lying down in bed.

Rest has got to be something which is positive which is re-creational in the fullest sense of the word. And something you can enjoy while you're in the possession of all your faculties.

That's the kind of rest that we need to find. I would even like to paraphrase a verse in the Bible and say that man cannot live by bread alone because we need something more radical than that kind of rest.

Some place of refreshment and renewal in the midst of our lives. And I think that's what Christ is offering to us. I think that's the invitation that he makes.

[15 : 11] And our inability to accept that rest I think comes from the fact that we spend a lot of our lives trying to do what God has already done.

We're trying to earn what God has given us as a gift. We're trying to build a kingdom which God has already established.

We're trying to deal with our own guilt which God in Christ has already dealt with. we're trying to win acceptance and this acceptance has already been given to us through Jesus Christ.

We're trying to be what we ought to be when God invites us to accept what we are and to allow him to work with us and do his work in us at that point.

We tend to think that God is a kind of senior executive who doesn't want to be bothered by us so that if we can manage on our own that we're doing God a favor because he's too busy to become involved with us.

[16 : 26] And so our restlessness comes of our trying to do what God has already done for us. and the rest of which Christ invites us is a rest of trust and faith in what he has done.

And not only what he has done but what we couldn't do for ourselves even if we were to expend the whole of our lives trying to. Rest is a very important concept throughout the Bible.

It gives a tremendous emphasis to this. It talks in Psalm 127 about people getting up early in the morning and working late at night and eating the bread of anxious toil and never recognizing that the rest that they are seeking can only come from God.

And you see, most of us are living our lives according to what Hans Berkey calls a script. And in that script is work, work, work, work, work, work, work and keep at it.

And we have to act out that script because we think that's what life is all about. And so as you look at it you realize how totally radical is this invitation from Christ when he says come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

[18 : 01] That God has in Christ extended an invitation to you to accept from him something which you can never do by yourself.

And that is what he has done for us in Christ. And I want more than anything that St. John's Church, Shaughnessy should be an answer to that invitation at a very it's a profound invitation which comes from the heart of the gospel in the 11th chapter of Matthew and goes to the heart of where you and I live our lives.

it's the heart of God speaking to our hearts. And this is the invitation. And I want that St. John's, Shaughnessy should be at the most primary level a response to that invitation.

Because if we are by our efforts and by the things that we are doing and the things that we are busying ourselves with trying to do what God has already done for us all we're going to end up is exhausted and overburdened and feeling that church is just one more thing which I in my busy life can't take on rather than finding it the heart of the life and the congregation of Christ's people is the reality of Christ's promise that I will give you rest and I will give you refreshment and I will give you a place of renewal and I will give you freedom from trying to do for yourself what I've already done for you.

One person said and I find this remarkably helpful myself you may not find it but what God has done for us in Christ is to enable us not to spend the whole of our life being religious because being religious we often regard as the work we do instead of letting God do it for us.

[20 : 23] and you can get into a fervor of religion if you try and do for yourself what God has already done for you. So that this is the invitation that I want to be central I want it to be central to you as I invite you to this Holy Communion service to receive what God has done for you in Christ to receive what God purposes to do for you by his Holy Spirit for us as a congregation not to be busy as busy as busy can be trying to accomplish something for God but people who are standing around rejoicing at what God has done for us and you may think that's far too passive but it's only far too passive because we are far too active far too busy far too committed to trying to do what God has already done for us.

and so I want you to hear the invitation to the communion as this invitation which Christ gives as the invitation which expresses the heart of the purpose of God towards you and offers you the opportunity to reply from your heart and Christ quite rightly describes my heart when he says you who are laboring and heavy burden whoever issued that invitation to me knows me and I want him I want you to be aware that he who issues that invitation to you knows you and knows all the specifics of the laboring and the burden that you're under and it's a very serious invitation and it's an invitation which as I say

I want us as a congregation to hear it's an invitation which I want the confirmation candidates to hear it's an invitation which I want people who come to church here as visitors occasionally I want them to hear the offering hymn is 397 choir Zeke after the offering Thank you.

Thank you.