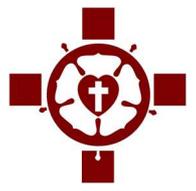




LUTHERAN PORT ELIZABETH FRIEDENSKIRCHE - CHURCH OF PEACE



Home Service for Second Sunday after Trinity The Invitation

13 June 2021

Watchword:

Christ says: Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

Opening

Good morning dear Congregation! Welcome to our Sunday celebration of the 2nd Sunday after Trinity. We hope to find joy when we can come together in church to worship together, to listen, sing and pray together in church. We have learnt that this is not a matter of course; and, that we do need a place we can come to and leave the cares and burdens of everyday life behind us, even if it is just for one hour on a Sunday morning. We all know the hardships and burdens of life: work and career, the tasks in the home and family. And even children do not get through the day carefree and effortlessly anymore. God invites us to the feast of life and to come to rest in Him. His invitation goes to all: the wealthy and the poor, the near and the distant, believers and doubters. There is no one who is excluded from this Godly invitation. All who have longing, all who carry a heavy load, - all are welcome. Happy are those who give heed to this invitation.

"I'm sorry, no time" – a rejection, quickly and carelessly said, sometimes regretted later. Who does not know this? The 2nd Sunday after Trinity encourages us not to turn down God's invitation, but to be called to his table in a colourfully mixed, growing community, in which there is a climate of mutual mindfulness and appreciation, openness to outsiders and forbearance towards the weaker. Christianity is not an exclusive club – thank God!

On this Sunday, but really each and every Sunday, we hear the invitation to the Great Feast of the Lord's Supper and thank God for letting us partake of His kingdom through Jesus Christ. The joy of this great invitation makes us welcoming people in return. May God bless and strengthen us with His Word.

Let us sing together the first hymn.

Opening Hymn LH 308,1+3

1 Come unto me you weary,
and I will give you rest.
O blessed voice of Jesus,
which comes to hearts oppressed.
It tells of benediction,
of pardon, grace, and peace,
of joy that has no ending,
of love that cannot cease.

Come unto me you weary,

3 Come unto me you fainting,
and I will give you life.
O blessed voice of Jesus,
which comes to end our strife.
Our hearts were filled with sadness,
and we had lost our way;
but He has brought us gladness
and songs at break of day.



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Introitus

- P. We are gathered here in the name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
C. **Amen.**
- P. Our help is in the Name of the Lord,
C. **who made heaven and earth.**
- P. We confess before a holy God that we have sinned with thoughts, words, and deeds, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinfulness by our own strength. Therefore, we seek refuge to our Heavenly Father's unfathomable compassion, and seeking mercy for the sake of Christ, we confess:
C. **God, be merciful to me, a sinner.**
The almighty God have mercy upon us, may He forgive us our sins and lead us to eternal life. Amen.
- P. In mercy of Almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you, and for his sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ he gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit.
C. **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 36:

- P: With you is the fountain of life:
C: **In your light we see light.**
- P: Your love oh Lord, reaches to the heavens;
C: **Your faithfulness to the skies.**
- P: Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains;
C: **Your justice like the great deep.**
- P: How priceless is your unfailing love:
C: **Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.**
- P: They feast on the abundance of your house:
C: **You give them drink from your river of delights.**
- C. **Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forevermore. Amen.**

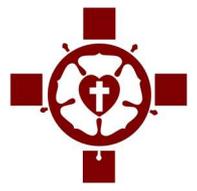
Kyrie, Gloria in excelsis

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| L. Kyrie eleison! | C. Lord, have mercy! |
| L. Christe eleison! | C. Christ, have mercy! |
| L. Kyrie eleison! | C. Lord have mercy! |
| L. Glory be to God in the highest! | C. And on earth peace, to all in whom He delights. |

All glory be to God on high! Who has our race befriended; to us no harm shall now come nigh, the strife at last is ended. God showeth His goodwill to us, and peace shall reign on earth again. O thank Him for His goodness!



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Sermon

Matthew 11:28

Grace and Peace be with you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For our sermon today I would like to meditate on the watchword for today from Matthew 11:28

Christ says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

Hearts, like oceans, are turbulent and deep, but who can still them? No person can do that by themselves. Anyone who has tried knows this. It is not to say that there is nothing we can do to better our anxious heart, that is not true. We can work with a therapist, take medication, go for a run, pray, listen to music, write, talk to a friend, think more positively, and so on. We can do all or some of these things, and our heart will respond. Anxiety is, after all, a physical symptom, as is the physiological response that creates and sustains it. So no, we are not helpless to anxiety's imprecations.

But there is a difference between a heart that is quieted and a heart that is at rest. A soldier on the battlefield may have a temporal peace when a ceasefire is called, but that does not cause him not to be anxious because he still anticipates that the battle will eventually commence again. He is, so to speak, "in peace" but not at rest. The outer, objective world of his experience offers him, at this moment, the respite of peace. But his heart of white-capped waves and sour foam does not allow him to partake of the invitation. He is somehow disconnected from the outside world, even though he is hyper-aware of it because his heart's inner world is a different place altogether. Or, at least, that is what he experiences. There is a difference between a heart that is quieted and a heart at peace or at rest.

Sometimes, I think the same is true for Christians who struggle with these verses. It is, without doubt, an invitation to a promised and objective reality—Jesus, the Prince of Peace, offering himself to us as our rest, a loving embrace for our troubled hearts. This verse has two parts, an offering, and an invitation. The offering is the rest Jesus offers to give us; a peace which he specifies is not like the more familiar notions of peace we hear about in the world. And the invitation is to "come" to him and "let" our hearts enter into his peace. How do we do that?

For many Christians, this is the most frustrating part because it puts the onus of the offering on our response. That is, if I do X then Jesus will do Y. So, anxious people feel a kind of hopeless or condemning word here. I have to do the "going" and the "letting" so that Jesus can do the "resting", and if I can get out of my own way, then I can experience a world free of anxiety. But what if I cannot? Then, instead of offering rest, this verse offers another pie-in-the-sky promise with the danger of self-flagellation. We become hopeless with the confounding reality that we cannot seem to do even this little bit to reap such a desired reward.



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But for many of us, there is something inside us theologically—we might call it our theological conscience or theological gut—that tells us that cannot be right. Somehow, we recognize that Jesus is not offering rest for a price we cannot pay. For the anxious, who have spilled their tears in prayer and avoided far too many opportunities, it also feels better to blame ourselves than God. So, better to say, "This verse is true, but I keep messing it up" than to think, "Maybe this verse is not true." But if we are honest, we have all wondered why this peace that sounds so wonderful is also so elusive. But perhaps now you are feeling a bit disappointed. Have we just cheapened the peace of Jesus? What you want is your anxiety to go away, and now it sounds like Jesus sold you on a Rolls Royce but what you received was something much more affordable (and therefore unexceptional). These feelings come out of our desperation as we contend with the turbulent waters of our hearts that cry out for stillness. And Jesus can still them just as he does many storms. But as long as we live in a sinful world, a broken world, anxiety, like sickness, is something that will remain.

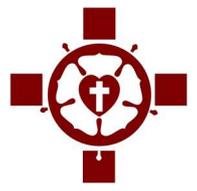
I think the key to understanding this dilemma comes, in part, from the context in which Jesus speaks these words. On more than one occasion Jesus talks in rather graphic detail about how the church will experience persecution and martyrdom. Explicitly then, the rest that Jesus is offering cannot be a rest where we have no anxiety since Jesus is speaking into the reality that we will have anxiety but that it will not overpower us to the point that we lose our faith. The rest of Jesus is not always a quiet rest from anxiety but a confident strength that God will win the day despite our anxiety and failings.

Jesus offers a unique kind of rest. What he offers is first and foremost the peace of the Gospel, which is a kind of confidence or assurance that our lives are caught up in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' peace ensures that our sins are forgiven and that we are adopted into his family so that we are never left as orphans struggling with all our problems alone.

The Gospel is not an anti-depressant; it is a word of promise. As such, the nature of the Gospel is not to make us powerful but to embrace our weakness as a reality that requires us to seek shelter in the One who is all-powerful and loves us unconditionally. The peace and the rest that Jesus offers us is, like the soldier, rest, and peace within a war. And everyone is fighting a battle of some kind: anxiety, addiction, poverty, sickness, disability, loneliness, rejection, etc. Right now, we are all fighting a war against covid. The invitation to "come to rest" and "let" our hearts not be troubled is not an invitation to do but an invitation to *not* do. It is a calling, a summons, to hear, to really attend to what Christ is doing. That is all it is. To hear what Jesus is saying. Not only that, multiple times in the passage, Jesus says the Holy Spirit will work with our hearing to produce remembrance and faith in these words. All this leaves us with one last question: how does the peace of Jesus, the Gospel, work to still our anxiety because we need Jesus to do that?



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The answer is that it transforms our perspective by giving us the eyes of faith so that we do not live *just* with the eyes of experience. Slowly, gently—more like erosion than like an explosion, the remembered Word of God transforms us into the image of his Son. The more we hear that word and struggle and wrestle with it, the more we abide in it and pray it, the more it works upon us to bear fruit. To celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, (which we do every Sunday), is to celebrate the death of hopelessness. If death can be outmatched, then nothing is fated to failure. No one is fated to a life of misery. Everyone can receive the rest and peace of God and, in time as the Lord leads, reach new places of clarity and freedom. That peace is always working, but it can be hard to see in the everyday struggles of life, and we will never be totally free of troubles in this life. The peace of Jesus is not an escape from life's troubles (that comes in our own resurrection) but a partnership where we, once trying to make it through a day on our own unreliable strength, become enjoined to the One who never fails and will never leave us.

When our anxiety gets the better of us, it is easy to dismiss Jesus' words as empty. But Jesus' words are not barren; they are filled with himself. Anxiety is a habit of avoidance coupled with negative thinking. Jesus offers to the anxious soul the one thing it ironically wants: certainty of the good. The more that vision of certainty is held before our hearts, the more they can participate, turbulent or not, in the promised and lasting peace of Christ. He is the One who faced his fears for our salvation so that we never have to face ours with the fear that we would remain lost.

Do not let your hearts be troubled; Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. It is not a command; it is an invitation.

May the Peace of Christ that surpasses all knowledge and understanding give you rest. Amen.

Hymn 12,1+2 (modernized)

1 Comfort, comfort all my people,
with the comfort of my Word.
Speak it tender to my people;
all your sins are taken away.
Though your tears be rivers wide,
Though they be an ocean full.
Though you cry with hurt of living,
Sure' my comfort shall be given.

Comfort, comfort all my people,

2 Though your eyes see only darkness,
Though your eyes can see no light;
Though your eyes see pain and sorrow,
comfort shall come in your night.
Every night shall have its morn'
Every pain will have an end;
Every burden will be lightened,
And your face again be brightened.



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Church Prayer

Lord God, Heavenly Father. We thank you for not leaving us alone, but for turning to us again and again through your Word that is proclaimed to us. We want to take it to heart: You alone are our God. You are our help and our strength in difficult times. Your love carries us when it is difficult for us to walk upright. You want to give new strength to the weary. Let us always hear your Word anew and your call, to experience the meaning and fulfilment of our lives in Christ.

We pray for all those who are threatened to break under their heavy burden, who are being crushed by their circumstances, especially in these exceptionally difficult times.

Speak your healing word, to the sick and their loved ones, and to the fearful. Save us and our loved ones from the consequences of a 3rd wave of covid in our country and heal all those who are sick. Comfort the families of those who have died. Let all who have preceded us in death be safe with you forever. We also pray for the people who are afraid of death, who cannot imagine that you are a God that gives eternal life: let your light shine into these dark places with the understanding that you have overcome death. Speak your comforting word, to those who mourn, to those who have lost their trust, to the disappointed and forsaken.

We pray for the people who have endless worries about their existential needs, the unemployed and those who suffer from disabilities and chronic illness. Show us where we can be of help and show us ways in which we can help; also give us the strength and courage to do so.

Speak your mighty word to those in power and have influence. Your word gives justice and life. Stand at the side of the afflicted and heal the wounds of the abused and the downtrodden.

Speak your encouraging word, to our children, who are already overburdened in their young lives; whose young minds are overloaded with everything technology has to offer them. Protect our children Lord and strengthen parents and also teachers in the difficult task of rearing and guiding their children.

We pray for your church that she may be credible and stand up for the people who are in need. We pray that you awaken preachers to proclaim the Spirit of love and justice, the Spirit of truth and freedom, so that through word and deed the darkness of fear and distress, hunger and poverty, injustice and lack of freedom may be driven out by your light.

We pray for our own congregation: that our togetherness in celebration and Christian practice in our everyday lives is filled with the spirit of community, kindness, and help; the willingness to approach and accept one another; that God will make us capable of the tasks that await us here; and that, where we reach our limits, we trust in Him who can do all things.

Stand up for us, merciful God, when we fail. Lift us up when we are despondent. Give us the peace that can come from you alone and guide us on the path of hope and eternal life. Glory be to you forever through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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Holy Communion

Hymn LH 285, 1+3

1 To your most holy supper, Lord,
in love you do invite us.
Your body and your blood our food
to strengthen and delight us.
As weary souls by sin oppressed,
we come to You for needed rest,
for comfort and for pardon.

To your most holy supper,

3 'This is my body, this my blood',
we eat and drink believing;
with bread and cup this heavenly food
our lips are here receiving.
Refresh me by your saving grace,
that trusting you throughout my days,
I live to you my Saviour.

Preface, Sanctus, Our Father, Words of Institution, Agnus Dei Invitation, Distribution

Post Communion Prayer

We thank you Lord, that we could come to your table with all our cares and receive from your grace what we need in body and soul. Strengthen and guide our steps in the coming week and be with us always and everywhere, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C. Amen.

Closing Hymn Sup 888, 1+2 Jesus, our Saviour of true joy the Giver,

1. May the waking sun delight you,
and its evening call to prayer.
May the moon and stars surprise you,
spin your heart to worlds unseen.
May the storms with all their wildness
bring you courage, call to strength.
May the darkness be your comfort,
soft prepare for light of day.

3 May the feet of God walk with you
and His hand hold you tight.
May the eye of God rest on you
and His ear hear your cry.
May the smile of God be for you,
and His breath give you life.
May the Child of God grow in you
and His love bring you home.

Blessing

L. Depart in the peace of the Lord

C. Thanks be to God.

L. May we go into this week strengthened by the Word of God and His blessing:

L: The Lord bless you and keep you;

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you;

The Lord look on you with favour and give you, His peace.

C. Amen, Amen, Amen