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Sermon Text: Matthew 11:25-30

REST THAT MAKES A BURDEN LIGHT

In 1917 in Omaha, Nebraska, Father Edward Flanagan opened a home for orphaned boys called Boys Town. Flanagan's work at the institution became famous as a result of the movie *Boys Town* in 1938 starring Spencer Tracy. One time, there was a lad who was afflicted by polio. He had to wear heavy metal braces on his crippled legs. He didn't negotiate stairs very well, so the other boys would take turns carrying him piggyback. Father Flanagan asked one of those boys if it grew tiresome to carry him around. The boy replied, "He ain't heavy, Father. He's my brother." Those words became immortalized in the American culture by a magazine article in 1943 and also by a rock band called The Hollies in 1969 with the song, *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*.

That line epitomizes the truth that when you love someone you don't think of it as work to do something for them. As we meditate on Jesus' words today from Matthew chapter 11, let's borrow that line from Boys Town but make it Christ-centered. When we bear the burdens of life and especially the burdens of the Christian faith, we could say, "These ain't heavy because Christ is my Brother."

Christ promises, *Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest*. He promises rest that makes a burden light. In the context of Jesus' words, let's consider two things that make Jesus' rest unique.

First, what makes Jesus' rest unique is that it is hidden. No human on earth could have guessed it or come up with it on their own. It has to be revealed. We have to be told about it. But hearing it is not enough by itself either. The Holy Spirit must enlighten us to believe what we're being told. Praying to His Father, Jesus said, *I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from clever and learned people and have revealed them to little children*. God loves to reveal His salvation to the simple-minded, the little children, and hide it from the intelligent, the high and mighty, to demonstrate that salvation is entirely dependent on Him -not on us or our character or our native abilities. My father was a pastor. He once told me that in all his years of ministry among the countless people he had served, the person that to him seemed to have the best grasp of the Gospel was an individual who was mentally handicapped. That's because faith and understanding are a gift of the Holy Spirit.

That is not to say that God doesn't want us to excel in learning the truths of His written Word. He most certainly does. But the better we understand His Word, the more we discover the hidden truth that we are helpless and weak like children to save ourselves. Everything depends upon God.

More specifically, everything depends on His Son Jesus. Jesus is our bridge to God. In fact, it is impossible to know God, to come to God, to be saved by God apart from Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *Everything has 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 wants to reveal him.* If you want to know God, if you want to know God's intentions toward you, look to Jesus. Everything that you could possibly need to know about God is embodied in Jesus.

And to whom does Jesus extend the invitation to know God? Listen to what Jesus says, 28 *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* This brings us to the second thing that makes Jesus' rest unique. It is a rest that makes a burden light. There are two words in what Jesus said that play off each other. The first is weary: come to me all you who are weary. That word "weary" means "beaten up." Then Jesus says, "And I will give you rest." That word "rest" means "refreshment that enables you to get up and fight again."

Notice, Jesus doesn't invite those who are doing pretty well, those who have their act together, those who are feeling strong, the happy-go-lucky, the successful, the decent or the virtuous. He invites the beaten up and the burdened to receive His rest.

Perhaps it is guilt from years past that punches you in the gut now and again. Perhaps it is current shame that burdens you, or the never ceasing effort to camouflage the shame that keeps you exhausted. Perhaps it is fear or grief or doubts that keeping pecking away at your soul, robbing you even of a restful night's sleep. Perhaps it is tragedy or betrayal or personal injury from those who should have loved you that leaves you horrified. And what about when you know what serves Christ, but serving him is painful? Swallowing an insult with a gracious smile, remaining faithful in a loveless marriage, being taken advantage of without retaliation, respecting a parent who has not behaved respectably, losing friendships because you won't go along with their ideas of fun. These things can be a heavy burden.

Jesus says, *I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you because my burden is light.* The rest with which Jesus refreshes you begins with the forgiveness of sins – forgiveness which He earned for you by His atoning death on the cross – forgiveness that makes you and God reconciled to each other, no longer at odds with each other, but completely on good and friendly terms – forgiveness that lifts away all the guilt, erases all the couldas, shouldas and wouldas. That's rest.

Having Christ's forgiveness also means that God will make good on all His promises to you. What's more, God will use even every bad thing, even every bad thing that you only have yourself to blame for, He will use it to bless you and save you. Jesus once said, *God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* Therefore, with sins forgiven, you can be assured God's intentions toward you are always only good. That's rest.

The fact that Christ sacrificed His life to save ours helps make a burden light. "Really? Christ did that for me? For me? The great and awesome King of heaven plunged into the depths of hell for me? What can I do for Him? It's no problem, really. What can I do? It'd be a pleasure for me to serve my hero-Savior, not a burden at all." That kind of burden is light.

Christ also gives us so many promises as we serve Him that lighten our burden even more. "Christ makes me royalty in His Kingdom? He gives me an everlasting life and shares with me His glory? He promises to turn my tears into dancing? Well, then swallowing an insult is a pleasure for His sake. Enduring someone's burdensome behavior becomes so much lighter. For I know dealing with such things here on earth is only temporary and what Christ has won for me is eternal." That is rest.

Christ offers His rest to us as He offers Himself to us in the Lord's Supper. There He gives us rest that makes a burden light. By His Spirit may He give us the faith to say: "These burdens ain't heavy, because Christ is my Brother."