

the eye.

But it's only when we realize how deep our own pit is that we can recognize that we desperately need this invitation in all its glorious simplicity. For there is nothing we can contribute to saving ourselves short of turning to the saviour and reaching out our hand.

In other words, what is required of us is we must throw away our ideas of goodness and our hope of earning our own way. We must throw away our self-defence and our justifications. We must throw away our resumes and our letters of recommendation. And we must come to Jesus with empty hands.

And what is it that Jesus promises to give us? "Rest." He offers us what we all want more than anything. We are weary from striving for it but never achieving it. We are burdened from our failure and not know what to do about it.

Oh sure, some of us get to take lovely vacations weeks at a time, and some of us drive really nice cars with seats that both heat and cool our bums as we drive, and sure we have nice homes with plenty of toys and luxuries to enjoy. But none of it gives us what we need most? We lack true soul level rest.

So many have so much and yet feel so poor. There's always that next thing that promises to transform our busy and hectic lives. But they never truly live up to their promises. At some point we give up on the idea of it. "No rest for the weary," we say. I'll just look forward to that trip next month...that will get me through somehow. But not so when we come to Jesus.

What is the nature of this rest he promises us? Well, it isn't what we think. It's not about sleep or relaxation or leisure. It's not about self-care or giving ourselves a little pampering because those are too much on the surface. It's not about vacations or get-aways or toys for boys. It's rest of heart, rest of the conscience, rest from our affections, and rest of our will.

Jesus offers us a rest that gets under and behind all of the motivations that send us off in all directions. His rest is unlike anything that could ever be bought, achieved or attained. Jesus' rest comes not from within as a kind of enlightenment of the mind, but it comes from outside us as good news.

Friends, this is why this is a Christmas message. Our rest is not an achievement at all. It's something that broke into our world one silent and holy night. Not by the works of great human beings, but by the mighty power of God who crept into history to give us the rest of heaven. In the words of the old hymn:
How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive Him still,
the dear Christ enters in.

"Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

How does Jesus rest come? Jesus intercedes for us, being our Lord and Saviour not long ago but every day. Jesus adopts us into his family and by our adoption we are given an inheritance beyond anything we might scrimp and save for ourselves. And Jesus forgives us for our sins and clothes us in his righteousness before God. He gives us a way forward beyond guilt and shame.

I don't know how your Christmas to-do list is going. But do not be so busy this year that you miss the simplest and most glorious of invitations.

J.C. Ryle says, "Faith, simple faith, is the one thing needed in order to possess Christ's rest. Faith in Christ is the grand secret of happiness. Neither poverty, nor ignorance, nor tribulation, nor distress can prevent men and women from feeling rest of soul if they will only come to Christ and believe."

Thanks be to God, Amen.

"Prepare Him Room: Come Rest"

December 3rd, 2023 — Selby United Church — Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30
By Rev. Mike Putnam

The season of Advent is a season of preparation. It's a time when we are to slow down, light candles one at a time, and join with the faithful through the ages who look both back to the birth of Christ and forward to the return of Christ. Advent is a season of waiting. But let's be honest, we're not very good at waiting. We're more inclined to the preparing part. And I'm pretty sure you've got your to-do list. I'm pretty sure you need no help coming up with a few more things that need to get done between now and the holidays.

I'm actually pretty sure you don't need a sermon series about getting ready for Christmas. You know how to do that. You're already full steam ahead! In fact, it's a small miracle you were able to carve out this hour to be here this morning. Because you've got places to be, gifts to wrap, baking to do, a house to clean, decorations to hang, gatherings to attend, and concerts to enjoy. How did you manage to get here this morning?

And so, I'm aware of the challenge of a sermon series called "Prepare Him Room." Because our minds instantly go to our lists. Now you've come to church and I'm going to give you one more thing to do.

...But then, "Jesus is the reason for the season", so I suppose we could all squeeze in one more thing...somehow? But what's involved? What will it take? What must I do? Will it take long? And the resounding answer from heaven is this: "Come unto me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

This is truly a Christmas invitation. These are words worthy of being hung by the mantle with care. These are words that should be sung at the top of our lungs in this season. But these are words that only heaven can offer.

Jesus speaks a word of power and authority over our lists this morning, "Come unto me and rest."

It's possible that this season you have and will receive invitations to many things. You will have ample opportunities to keep busy and to take in the sights, sounds and tastes of this season. But today I speak of an invitation like no other.

But this invitation is not just one more. It must not be ignored. There is no more urgent message for each of us here today. For we know there are some who were present last year who will not gather with us this Christmas. And there are some for whom this will be their last. But we don't know, we simply take each day and each season as a gift. But this invitation has an expiry date.

And so, the invitation of which I speak is urgent. But it's also the most glorious invitation you will receive this year. It is worthy of your time here this morning. This invitation comes from my Master, and he wants me to tell you that his Christmas wish above all is that you will "Come unto him, you who are weary and burdened, so that he can give you his rest."

This simple line is my complete text for today. We need nothing more on this first Sunday of Advent. Because this simple line is deceptively complex. It offers us enough sustenance and substance to last us a hundred sermons, but for today it will give us more than enough food for thought.

Because there are four questions in this line that need to be answered this morning. And on each of these I invite you not simply to listen but to ponder the answers that come deep from within your soul. And the four questions are these:

1. Who is the one who makes this invitation?
2. Who is this invitation for?

3. What does this invitation require of me?

4. What does this invitation offer me?

First, who is the one who makes this invitation? And this question matters, because in our day especially there are cheats and scams and fraudsters around every corner. You really can't trust anyone, it seems.

You hear of people calling up the elderly impersonating one of their own grandchildren in need of money. Every email needs to be scrutinized for its authenticity. I recently heard of a local church that had their email broken into and it was a hacker trying to get money out of parishioners.

So, who is the speaker of this invitation? Can he be trusted? Because the value of a cheque depends entirely on the name which is signed at the bottom. Is this invitation worth the paper it's printed on?

And the answer is that the one who makes this invitation is The Almighty One. He is God - the Father's equal. He is very God of very God. By him all things were made.

He has power in heaven and on earth. In the words said by the beaver about Aslan in *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, "He is good, but he is not safe."

This One knows your heart most thoroughly. He's sees your need, your weariness, your hunger, your pain, your temptations. He doesn't need to send you for some diagnostic tests and when we get the results, we'll decide on the best course of action. This One, is the Great Physician who looks not at outward appearances but who looks directly into your heart.

The one who speaks this invitation to you this morning is one who never breaks his word. It's impossible for God to lie. God is righteous and holy through and through.

This is the one who sends you the invitation that is before you today. It is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We must give him the credit he is due. We must give him a

proper hearing. We can trust every word from his mouth, and we cannot refuse his offer.

But now, who is this invitation for? Jesus addresses it to "all" who are "weary and burdened." This is a stunningly broad group. Surely, we're already thinking of some limitations that should apply. Maybe Jesus needs a little fine print at the bottom of this thing. Maybe Jesus should have had the heavenly lawyers look at this before he just put it out there.

Because who are the "weary and burdened"? They're not limited to a certain geography, nor by class, age, gender or lifestyle. They are also not limited by their degree of sinfulness or purity. Jesus has just blown the doors of heaven wide open!

What is the cause of the weariness and burdens in our world today? What is the source of the world's trouble, care, sorrow, anxiety, murmuring, discontent and unrest? Is it a flaw in the natural order? Is it a mistake on God's part? Is it a weakness in the design?

No, the problem is the human heart. God gave us the potential to choose good and evil. Because that's the only way true love can exist. For true love to exist there must also be the option to choose the other.

But the problem is that because of sin, the human heart has become broken. Our hearts were made to desire God. But instead, we desire God substitutes. And this is the universal disease that has infected us all. We all seek after something of our own making that can meet our hearts deepest yearnings.

But interestingly few would identify this as the problem. Our diagnoses are not very accurate. In our minds the problem is always external to us. It's the bad guys out there. It's the government. The problem in the world today is people who just aren't thinking clearly and we just need a bit of education for them about the true issues and then we well-meaning folks will set to work righting every wrong, sorting every mess and cleaning things up once and for all. It's

progress! We just need to straighten out those other people. And yet, weariness and burden persists...because the problem is me too!

J.C. Ryle says it this way, "If you have an aching heart or a sore conscience – if you want rest for a weary soul, and know not where to find it – if you want peace for a guilty heart, and are at a loss which way to turn – you are the man, you are the woman, to whom Jesus speaks today."

But we're quick to justify ourselves, aren't we? There are some in the room today who are absolutely convinced this invitation can't be for them because they simply aren't worthy of it. It's for someone else! Because "I'm not good enough, you don't know what I've done, or you don't know what I'm capable of and God will never forgive me."

And then there are some in the room today who are convinced this invitation can't be for them because I'm already a pretty good person – I know there are some who need this kind of thing but I'm just not one of them. I've done my best and surely that's good enough for God. I mean, no one's perfect but in my simple upper-middle class lifestyle I've concluded I've done alright...assuming God is marking on the curve!

But you see we misunderstand who God is and what God has in store. There is no level of sin that God can tolerate. We're talking about the One who is perfect and who demands perfection. ...And yet because of Jesus there is no level of sin that is beyond the redemptive power of God.

But, no matter where you fall on the spectrum of self-evaluation – what you must know is that God doesn't see things the way you do. This invitation is for you, and he has arranged by divine appointment, for you to hear it this morning.

So, that's who made the invitation and that's who this invitation is for. Now we must get to what this invitation requires of you?

It's only three words long. Jesus

speaks with a "grand simplicity," "Come unto me."

Christianity is simple even as it's beautifully complex. It's, on the most basic level, answering the essential question, "what does it mean to come unto Jesus."

There's a sign on 41 highway – just north of Roblin. You've seen it. You've probably thought to yourself, "That sounds a little too simplistic." "All who believe unto the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved." But it's not wrong. But I acknowledge it chafes against our individualistic self-made ethic, doesn't it?

Because Jesus doesn't say, "come unto me and pay me what you owe me." We'd understand that. We'd respect that. And it's not "stand still and just wait." Jesus doesn't say there is nothing to be done. No, he calls you to action this morning.

But it's not what we think or even what we'd want. It's not come to church, come to the Lord's table, come to the minister for counselling, or come to Bible study. Just do a little self-improvement! Because that would be just one more way that we save ourselves.

No, Jesus' instructions are clear. "Come unto me." Believe on him and nothing else.

But in order for that invitation to feel urgent and necessary we need to feel the weight of our sin. We need the Holy Spirit to do what the Holy Spirit does – which is to show us how far we have drifted from the standards of God. We need to be convicted in our own minds and feel the chasm of unworthiness open below our feet.

And this is not something most people want to do. It's something most of us will struggle and thrash to avoid. It might even make us angry to think that God would first make us feel bad about ourselves – especially in a culture that tries so hard to affirm us as we are. So, we busy ourselves with endless holiday preparations and attempts at self-improvement, ignoring the invitation Jesus has for us because we don't want to look our sin in