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*“Rest Stop” Matthew 11:28-29*

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I have heard it said, many times, that marriage is the art of compromise. I have learned – many, many times – how true this saying is. One of the interesting compromises that Colleen and I had to make, very early in our time together, was on the issue of rest stops. We were taking our first long trip together, driving from Long Island to Michigan. We drove from Long Island across the bridge to New York City, then across another bridge to New Jersey. Now, that can be an hour trip, or it can be a three-hour trip. But we made it that day in good time. We were just a short way into New Jersey, when, to my surprise, the discussion of a rest stop came up. I was used to stopping halfway through Pennsylvania, taking as few rest stops as possible. My beloved Colleen comes from a different school of thought. So, we started meeting in the middle that day on the issue of rest stops. I’ve noticed, thought the years, that the “middle” has been shifting in my wife’s direction; but that’s OK.

How many of you, when you are traveling, are, like me, infrequent rest stop people? Raise your hand. And how many of you are frequent rest stop people? Raise your hand. It’s OK, we still love you. And here’s the real question for today. How often do you make a rest stop for your soul? Jesus speaks to us today about a need we all have – the need to find rest for our souls. How often do you do that?

Listen to Jesus’ words again: “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” (Matthew 11:28-29).

See, Jesus understands how this world we live in can wear us out. Maybe your little corner of the world is just sweetness and light, and roses and cupcakes all day long. If that's how life is for you, I'm so happy for you. But most of us are living in a world that's tough on us, a world that likes to beat us up every so often, a world that challenges and opposes our faith. We live in a world that's full of sin. And even though we rejoice that Jesus forgives *our* sin, we are still knee deep every day – neck deep, some days – in the stresses and strife that are caused by sin. We live in the greatest country on earth (maybe not the greatest soccer country); but, even living in this free land, we are shackled by so many anxieties, fears, doubts, and worries. And often those things occupy our minds more than faith does. Isn't that the truth? Living in this world of ours can really wear us out!

Sometimes it can be overwhelming just to keep our faith in God alive and strong. As Christians, the Bible says, we walk "by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). But that can be exhausting. If I can't see what God is doing to help me ... if you can't see God's answers to your prayers ... if we can't see any reasons for the suffering we're going through ... our faith can falter, our souls can just get worn out.

Where do we find rest, for our souls? Where is the rest stop we need?

Is it here? Well, going to church can be restful. And I'm not talking about those of you who like to take a little nap during the sermon. I'm talking about the church as a refuge, a sanctuary from the world, a spiritual pit stop where our souls are nourished by the sweet forgiveness of Christ and by the warm fellowship of the church family. Yes, Jesus wants us to be in church, gathering for worship, every week; but notice he doesn't say, "Go to church, and there you will find rest for your souls."

And Jesus doesn't say, "Join a small group, and there you'll find rest for your souls." Nor does the Lord say, "Say your prayers every night, read your Bible every day, and have some faith-building conversations in your family on a regular basis, and you will find rest for your souls." All of these are wonderful and beneficial things for us to do; and I strongly recommend them to every one of you. But where is the rest stop that we really need?

What does Jesus say? "Come to **me**, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and **I** will give you rest." Jesus is our soul's rest stop. He invites you today to rest in him. It doesn't matter where you're at on your life's journey, doesn't matter where you've been, doesn't matter what rough roads you've been traveling. Jesus is waving you on in. Come to Jesus, and you will find rest for your worn-out, tired-out, wacked-out soul.

How often are you doing that? Coming to Jesus? When you walk through those doors, are you coming to church, or coming to spend quality, personal time with Jesus? When you hear the Bible readings, is it in one ear and out the other? Or is your heart open to hear the words Jesus has to share for your life, for your family, for your work? When you kneel at that altar rail, are you kneeling in ritual, or kneeling to receive the precious body and blood of Christ for your soul's salvation? When you pray with your family before a mealtime, are you reciting words, or are you feeling the presence of your Savior at your table?

The question of the day, friends: how often do you make a rest stop for your soul? Jesus says, "Come to me, you who are tired and burdened, and I will give you rest."

There is a Christian church in a very poor, rural area of India, in which the altar up front is unusually high, about shoulder height for a grown man. A visitor asked the pastor, “Why such a high altar?” The pastor responded, “Most of my people are too poor to afford even a donkey or an ox to carry their produce to market. So they carry huge, heavy burdens on their shoulders or atop their heads every day. This altar is a visible reminder that Jesus wants to be our rest. We can rest our burdens – whatever they may be – on him.”

So can we. So can you. Jesus is your rest stop. How often will you make a rest stop for your soul this week? Please pray with me.

*Lord, we come to you today with souls that are tired, drained, spent. We don't have the strength to face up to all of the world's challenges to our faith. We lack the energy to resist sin and fight temptations. And so we come to you now, Lord, in this moment, in this place. Thank you for loving us, welcoming us, and forgiving us. Give us rest, in knowing that you are right here with us and for us. And with that rest, O Lord, give us renewal. Reinvigorate our souls today to proclaim and live your Word and your love. Thank you, Jesus, for being our rest. Amen.*