

COME UNTO ME

Matthew 11:28-30; Donald Lutz Funeral; May 12, 2018

When we are born, the seed of death is already planted in us, and it grows and matures in us until it bears its fruit: death to our bodies. Death can strike quickly without warning. Or as in the case of Don, it can stalk you for years, creeping closer day by day as you weaken, until one day it simply overcomes you. Don knew that his body would one day fail him. He used his strength to fight off that day – God created us to live, not die – but one day his strength would be gone. Death is exhausting. It wears us down until it finally gets us.

For those who loved Don, his coming death was also exhausting, both physically and emotionally. Caring for a dying person robs us of our ability to get regular and peaceful sleep. When Don was fighting to stay alive, Delores was by his side through it all, caring for her husband. It was a labor of love, but it did not make it any less wearying. It was done in love, but with the heavy load of the knowledge that all those efforts would not prevent last Tuesday from coming. Caring for a dying loved one is both physically and emotionally exhausting.

Jesus came into this world to carry our heavy loads. Jesus came to bear in His body our deaths, to die our deaths, and rise again to give us life. But even as the cares of this life seek to wear us down and overcome us, Jesus comes to us with this invitation: **Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** In this invitation to come to Jesus is His promise that those who believe in Him will find rest for their bodies in their graves, the rest Don now has, until He raises our dead bodies and gives them life everlasting.

But there is the promise of rest not just in the future, but rest in Jesus for all who believe in Him in this life, this time before we die. Grief is a heavy load to bear in this life. It can be grief like today caused by death, which separates us from loved ones. Or it can be grief caused by sin that separates us from each other and from God. When we sin against God by forsaking Him to trust in ourselves, others, or even the things of this world, we cause breaks in our relationship with God. When we sin against each other we cause breaks in relationships with each other. These losses are heavy loads we labor under.

Jesus promises that, if we come to Him with these loads, He will give us rest. How does that work? Jesus uses an image from farming to show how we find rest in Him. **“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. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”** What is this “yoke” Jesus promises will give us rest and make our burdens light?

You probably know that a “yoke” is a piece of equipment that you harness to oxen or horses so they can pull a heavy load. A yoke connects two animals to each other so they can work together in tandem. So, for Jesus to say that we should take His yoke on us to find rest and give us a light burden seems wrong. Shouldn't Jesus say something like, “I'll take off your yokes so you can find rest”? How can taking on His yoke lead to rest for us?

When we take on Jesus' yoke, that is, when we are yoked together with Jesus, He does all the pulling for us. When we are yoked to Jesus, all that we have been laboring under and loaded on us gets transferred to Jesus. We go from carrying and pulling the load alone to Him pulling for us and with us.

For Don, when he was yoked to Jesus at his baptism, Jesus took the load of sin on Himself, carried Don's sin to the cross, and paid for it there. Jesus took Don's death on himself, dying it for him, and rose to raise Don to life again. This is why Jesus can say that **His yoke is easy, and His burden is light**. What were we too weak to bear, He bears for us. What is too heavy for us to bear, our sin and death as a result, He bears and defeats for us.

To those who are burdened with a load of grief at Don's death, Jesus says: **Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest**. Jesus knows our grief at our loss and did something about it. Jesus understands that death separates us from our loved ones and He died to do away with that separation. Jesus knows how sin separates us from God and each other so He died and rose to pay for that sin and reconcile us to God and each other. That happens because the sin that kills and separates us has died with Jesus.

Don's body will be buried with the wounds and scars he received in this life. Because he rests in the wounds of Christ, He will be raised in his body to live with Christ forever. Don now rests from the labors of this life as he waits for the glorious day he will be raised by Christ to live in glory forever. Don listened in faith to Jesus' invitation to come unto Him and has received his/His rest. The writer to the Hebrews in our Epistle for today stated: **So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from His.**

We who are left, who continue to labor under a heavy load, have the same invitation. **Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** If we decide to carry the load of grief now on our own, it will too much for us to bear. But if we have faith in Jesus, we will want to be yoked to Him so He can bear it for us. The pain of the loss will remain for us. The sting of death remains with us as long we live, but it will not be too much for us because its sting has been overcome by Jesus' victory over death.

Jesus promises rest to us, the same rest Don already has entered. The writer to the Hebrews also encourages us in our faith: **Let us therefore strive to enter that rest.** We do that in faith by taking on the yoke of Christ. He must carry our sins and sorrows for us. Otherwise the pain our losses will be too much for us to endure.

Don had the reputation of wanting things done the right way. Like many other farmers, he was known to drive through the countryside to see how others were doing. He had his standards, but they applied to him as much as anyone. One of the things that frustrated him most, I think, was his increasing weakness and coming death meant he could not take care of Delores the way he thought he should. If asked, he would probably say he failed her, and that caused his tears.

On a day like today, we give thanks that God does not fail us when we fail Him and each other. When we carry those burdens that load us down, Jesus comes to us and says: **Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** Don now rests in Jesus. Let us strive to enter the same rest. Amen.