

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

July 5, 2020

Psalm 145:1-14 (NIV) ¹I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. ²Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. ³Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. ⁴One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. ⁵They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. ⁶They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. ⁷They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. ⁸The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. ⁹The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. ¹⁰All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. ¹¹They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, ¹²so that all men may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. ¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. ¹⁴The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

Zechariah 9:9-12 (NIV) ⁹Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. ¹⁰I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. ¹²Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

Romans 7:14-25 (NIV) ¹⁴We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Matthew 11:25-30 (NIV) ²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The Invitation of the Kingdom

Matthew 11:25-30

Have you ever received an invitation that thrilled you?

The gospel of Matthew is filled with them.

In our gospel today, we find one of the greatest and best loved invitations of Jesus:

28"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Today I want to unpack that invitation, and the context in which it was given, and discover the many facets of Christ's invitation, which causes it to shine with brilliance like the facets of a diamond which refract the light so it sparkles with the colors of the rainbow.

First we have . . .

❑ **The invitation to praise** (verse 25; Psalm 145)

Verse 25 begins: *At that time Jesus said, "I **praise** you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . .*

If there is one thread running through each of today's readings, it is praise and thanksgiving to God.

Praise takes our eyes off the problems, the troubles and even the tragedies of our lives and lifts them up to see the Lord—in all of His glory and splendor, in all His goodness and grace.

Our Psalm for today, Psalm 145, is one of my favorites. Almost every morning, as I awaken from sleep, my first thoughts come from verses 1-2: *1I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. 2Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.*

If we grumble and complain, we cannot help but feel grumpy and depressed.

But when we offer heartfelt praise (whether it is to God or even to other people) we cannot help but feel uplifted and filled with joy.

Not coincidentally, Psalm 145 is an Old Testament example of proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom which is the theme of our messages from the book of Matthew. Again, and again, the Psalm exalts the *glorious splendor of God's kingdom*—His rule, his sovereign reign, over our lives.

But to praise God, we must first know Him. So, we are given the

❑ **The invitation to know** (verses 25-27)

*25At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and **revealed** them to little children. 26Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. 27"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one **knows** the Son except the Father, and no one **knows** the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to **reveal him**.*

We cannot **know** God unless he chooses to reveal himself. We cannot do a scientific experiment to find God or to ascertain His attributes. God is not available for our inspection by earthly means.

God is hidden. Isaiah said, "*surely you are a God who hides himself*" (Isaiah 45:15). But God hides himself in plain view—He is to be found in all the ordinary joys of life—a brilliant sunset, the colorful flowers and pungent fragrance of spring, the quiet stillness of a winter night. God is there even in our sorrows, grief and pain.

But God can be discovered in these only as He opens our eyes and our hearts to discover Him there—only as He shows Himself to us.

When I was in college, a co-worker of mine became a Christian during the summer that we worked

together. Knowing that Chris was an avid climber I asked him: “before you were a Christian, what did you think when you stood on top of a peak surrounded by all the grandeur and beauty of the mountains.” I’ll never forget his answer. He said, “It was always so overwhelming and it filled me with such an intense joy that I wanted to shout with praise, but I didn’t know who to thank.”

When we know God, will praise Him.

In Ephesians 1:17-18 the apostle Paul prays: *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.* ¹⁸*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know . . .* (NIV)

God wants us to know Him better; and the only way you can truly know a person is if they disclose to us their thoughts and feelings, their plans and purposes.

We can know a lot about a person without really knowing them. If you are very clever, or hire a private investigator, you can compile quite a dossier about your neighbor or co-worker; but although you discover a lot about that person, you will not actually know them.

God has revealed to us, through the Bible, His thoughts about us, His plans and purposes—and even His feelings towards us.

In verse 26, Jesus says that it gives God pleasure to reveal Himself to those who will receive His kingdom like a little child (Matthew 19:4)

I John 3:1 says, *See what love the Father has for us that we should be called children of God.* [Actually the word *love* in the Bible is not a feeling but an action. It does, however, express the depth of God’s emotion towards us.]

Jesus said in John 10:14, *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”* (NIV).

In John 17:3 Jesus prayed: *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.* (NIV)

To know God is to love Him. To know God is to have eternal life.

And as we learned from Psalm 145, to know God is to praise Him.

But in order for us to know God, we must first heed

□ **The invitation to come** (verse 28)

²⁸*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”*

In our OT lesson Zechariah prophesied:

See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey

And now the King, having come to us, invites us to come to Him.

Jesus calls us to come with all our weariness, and all our burdens, because Jesus came to bear our sorrows and carry our burdens (Isaiah 53:4).

Jesus came to relieve the exhausting weariness of running our own lives, of being our own savior, of being our own god.

Jesus came to take away the burden of our sin by nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:14).

When Jesus invites us to come, He doesn’t expect us to wait until we get our act together, or come on our own terms, when we feel like or when it is “convenient” for us. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew to follow Him, Matthew 4:20 tells us that *at once they left their nets and followed Him.* It was the same for James and John: *and immediately*

they left the boat and their father and followed Him (Matthew 4:22).

Jesus calls us just as we are and just where we are. We can't make ourselves more acceptable to Him or make ourselves worthy of His calling. We are not worthy and He accepts us with all our sin and brokenness and shame. Jesus doesn't call perfect people—there are none. Jesus calls sinful people, weary and burdened people. Those weary from trying—and failing—to measure up. Those burdened down with guilt.

Jesus called disfigured people so they could be made healthy and whole (Mark 3:3-5).

Jesus called hungry and thirsty people so they could be satisfied (John 6:35)

He called the blind so they could see (Matthew 20:30-34)

Jesus called people out of darkness and into the light of life (John 8:12; 1 Peter 2:9).

Jesus calls needy people like us, so that by relieving us of the weariness of our rebelliousness and the burden of our brokenness, Jesus can offer us

□ **The invitation to rest** (verse 28)

*28"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and **I will give you rest.**"*

Rest is to place ourselves fully into God's loving care. It is to allow God to carry us through our trials, our sorrow, our pain and our loneliness.

It is the rest Peter proclaimed Acts 3:19: *"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of **refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord."*

It is the rest Psalm 23 promises when the Lord, as our shepherd, makes us *lie down in green pastures*

and leads us beside quiet waters and restores our soul.

It is the rest that we find when we heed the call in Psalm 46:10, *"Be still and know that I am God."*

All this and much more Jesus promised when he said, *"I will give you rest."*

It is a present rest—right here and now—and an eternal rest.

In Scripture, God's rest is His kingdom, the inheritance prepared for us since the creation of the world. It is the place Jesus has gone to prepare for us . . . that we might *dwell in the house of the Lord, forever!* (Psalm 23:6).

But the invitation to rest does not mean inactivity. With rest comes

□ **The invitation to learn** (verse 29)

*29Take my yoke upon you and **learn** from me, for I am **gentle** and **humble** in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Jesus calls us to come to him and be with him—to *learn* of Him—learn of His gentleness and humility.

The word *learn* here comes from the same word as disciple. A disciple is a learner. We are to be learners of Jesus. As we come to Him, and are with Him, we learn what it means to be truly human. We see what real godliness and righteousness look like. We discover what is true compassion and kindness and love. We find out what it means to forgive and have mercy on others.

Finally, the prerequisite of learning from Christ is

□ **The invitation to be yoked with Christ** (verse 30)

*29Take my **yoke** upon you . . . 30For my **yoke** is easy and my burden is light."*

We are far removed from our agricultural roots. But I have talked to men and women whose fathers plowed and planted with teams of horses.

In Jesus day, the farmer would plow with oxen. A yoke was the wooden harness that joined the team together in order to pull the plow.

These verses always remind me of the large framed print that hung in my grandparent's bedroom. It pictured a farming scene in my grandfather's native Switzerland. A team of oxen, a large wooden yoke connecting them, grazed contentedly after having pulled a large sledge to thresh the wheat.

We must remember that Jesus was the son of a carpenter and most likely worked in that trade himself until he began his public ministry at about the age of 30. No doubt he had fashioned quite a few yokes and knew what he was speaking about.

Jesus said, ²⁹*Take my yoke upon you . . .* ³⁰*For my yoke is easy . . .*

The Greek word used here for *easy* means benevolent, kind and good, and is often translated in the Bible as kindness. The same word is used in the Bible to speak of the *kindness* of the Lord. In Ephesians 2:7 we are told that God will spend eternity lavishing upon us *the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus' yoke is actually a kindness to us—something that is beneficial and good.

There is work to be done and we are yoked with Christ to do it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*: Those who follow Jesus “escape from the hard yoke of their own [making] and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ.” Only then can we

“achieve perfect liberty and enjoy fellowship with Jesus”. . .

Bonhoeffer goes on to write: “Only the [one] who follows the command of Jesus without reserve, and submits unresistingly to His yoke, finds His burden easy, and under its gentle pressure receives the power to persevere in the right way. The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard, for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light.” (p. 31)

Today, Jesus you this invitation:

²⁸*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

Let us pray . . .

Benediction:

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.* (NIV)