

January 26, 2020

Matthew 11:28-30

What do you look for in a friend? A couple weeks ago, a young lady from the first and second grade room stops me in the hallway with a big, bright smile. She says something like this: “We have a new girl in our room. I get to be her friend!” I get to see things like that all the time in our hallways. Someone is having a bad day, I see classmates step in with a hug. Someone is feeling left out, I see classmates step in to include. Someone is a bit out of sorts, I see classmates put up with each other. I know it doesn’t always work that way. I know I don’t always work that way. But I know someone who does.

In our lesson today, he invites us. It might sound too good to be true. **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”** Why might that sound too good to be true? Because we know people who are just good time, good people kind of friends. What do I mean by that?

Good time friends might invite us to come out and play. Good time friends might invite us out for a night of fun on the town. But good time friends will only invite us as long as there are good times to be had, or as long as they can get what they want. But when you’re in trouble, when you’re hurting, when you need something from them - good time friends don’t invite any more. They care way more about themselves and their good times than they care about you.

Jesus isn’t just a good-time friend. And his invitation shows it. Jesus doesn’t say, “Come to me all you who are strong and happy.” “Come to me all you who have your act together.” “Come to me all you who have life figured out.” No, Jesus invites, **“Come to me all you who are weary and burdened.”** Jesus is the friend who cares about us even when we are sick and tired, hurt and heartbroken, worn out by life, and not any fun to be around. Jesus doesn’t turn his back on us, doesn’t walk out on us, doesn’t stop inviting us when we aren’t good time people.

But Jesus is the kind of friend who promises to be there for us, to care for us even when we don't have good times to offer. And he doesn't just say: "Here's what you need to do." You might know some friends like that, who always think they have the answer for your troubles. "Do this. Do that. You need more this, more that." They always have an answer, but they don't really understand or even try to understand. "Just do what I say and everything will be alright." We get tired of friends like that, don't we?

Sometimes we do that with Jesus. When a friend is having a problem we might say, "You should go to church more; you should read your Bible; you should pray more." We might have a good point, but we pile on a bunch of "you shoulds" and turn Jesus into a law, "DO MORE JESUS!" And instead of offering a caring Jesus we pile on the added weight of a bossy Jesus. And a bossy Jesus gets tiring too, doesn't he?

But Jesus didn't come to be a bossy Jesus. And - just to be clear - Jesus didn't come to be a "yes-friend" - "Yes, whatever you want. Yes, whatever makes you happy. Yes, whatever." Jesus doesn't say "yes" to the sin that kills. Jesus doesn't say "yes" to the sin that would cut us off from God. No, Jesus didn't come just to make us happy, just to make us feel good about ourselves. Jesus came to be a real friend, the kind of friend we need. And Jesus knows what kind of friend we need.

Some days we might wonder, "How could Jesus up in heaven - where life is all good - how could he understand what we go through? How could he know what kind of friend we need?" Because, down here in our world, Jesus went through it too. Jesus lived poor and hungry. He had to put up with people who "just didn't get it." He had friends who tried to run his life. He had friends who turned on him and betrayed him, friends who ditched him. We might say: "With friends like that, who needs enemies?" But Jesus had enemies too. Enemies who tried to bully him, who called him names, hit him, spit on him. Friends and enemies who called him wrong when he was right. Enemies who nailed him to a cross and killed him. Friends who let it happen. So don't ever think Jesus doesn't understand.

He does. And he cares. How do I know? Earlier I said that Jesus isn't just a "good people" kind of friend. You may have heard the saying, "birds of feather flock together." People often get together with their kind of people. And if we have the wrong kind of feathers, if we're different, then we probably aren't their kind of people. But if Jesus were the kind of friend looking for just his kind of people, he wouldn't be looking for us, would he? Why? None of us can measure up to Jesus. But Jesus didn't say, "Come to me all you who are good and right." or "Come to me all you who are honest and faithful and loving and caring." Jesus didn't even say, "Come to me all you who are good church people or good family people or good neighbors." Jesus isn't the kind of friend who invites only his kind of people, only the good kind of people.

No, Jesus invites all - all who are tired and worn out trying to get by and survive - all who are tired and worn out trying to hold things together and make things right - all who are tired and loaded down with trouble - all who are tired and crushed with guilt. Jesus invites all. And that means Jesus invites us.

"Come to me and I will give you rest." Jesus' invitation isn't a job offer -- if we work for Jesus, then Jesus will make things right. Jesus' invitation is not a sales offer -- if we pay up, then Jesus will make things right. Jesus is not inviting us to do something for him. But Jesus is offering to do something for us. That's right. Jesus isn't the kind of friend always looking to get from us; Jesus is the friend looking to give us what we need.

Jesus invites us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." What is so tiring and weighs us down so much we need God to give us rest? It's not just work and chores, day after day, week after week. Even if we didn't have any work or chores, we would still get tired and worn out.

Why? Every day we wake up in a world of sin and death. Every day we wake up facing a fight - people fighting to get what they want, people fighting just for the sake of fighting. Every day we get pushed or pulled or knocked around. Every day we wake up to a world where everything we see

will sooner or later break down, fall apart, get lost, or die. Living in this world of sin and death is frustrating; it's tiring; it weighs us down.

And so we plop down with our smart phones and hope to get some rest on Facebook. And what do we find? We don't measure up! Everybody we know is going out to eat, having a party, having the cutest kids, living the life. And we can't keep up. Tiring, isn't it?

Oh, it gets worse. We come to church hoping to get some rest and the preacher tells us about sin. We stay home and our conscience tells us about guilt. It's bad enough that we don't measure up on Facebook; worse, we don't measure up before God. And some day, some way, I'm going to have to pay. That's heavy. That's tiring. Isn't it?

So listen to Jesus: "Come to me and I will give you rest." He tells us, "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." We don't have to carry the guilt of our sin; we don't have to pay; we don't have to make ourselves right with God. Jesus has already done all that for us! For you! The blood of Jesus, his death on the cross, takes our sin away and makes us right with God. We don't have to live afraid of God. We don't have to live hoping he'll like us. He doesn't just like you, he loves you!

That means even when we mess up, even when things don't work out as we want, even when people turn on us, we aren't alone - we still have someone in our corner. With him, it doesn't matter if we can't keep up with our Facebook friends. It doesn't matter if we don't fit in or can't keep up with the rest of the world. With Jesus, we're going to a better world where we will all be better friends. With Jesus, we're going to heaven. And that, my friends, is what makes Jesus the best of friends. Amen.