

“Taking Your Rest”

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
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First Scripture Lesson: 1 John 2:12-14

Epistle Lesson: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

How many of you know the song, Jesus Loves Me, This I Know?” OK, let’s sing the first verse together. *Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, ...”*

I don’t know about you, but I’m pretty sure I knew Jesus loved me before I ever read it in the Bible. Was that true for anyone else here? Yes.

How did you come to know Jesus loves you before reading it in the Bible? Maybe it was the way followers of Jesus – adult Christians in your life – showed Jesus’ love in the way they treated you.

The point is, well before we could ever read the Bible we were reading people. Our parents and youth director and pastor and the members of the church were an open book to us when it came to knowing about Jesus – or not. Sometimes adults don’t reflect the true nature and teachings of Jesus, do they? Sometimes adults act badly.

It’s like the good Christian woman who was called as a witness in court. The prosecuting attorney approached her and asked, “Mrs. Jones, do you know me?” She responded: “Why, yes, I do, Mr. Williams. I’ve known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you’ve been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat on your wife, you manipulate people, and talk about them behind their backs. You think you’re a rising big shot when you haven’t even gotten off the ground floor. Yes, I know you.” The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, “Mrs. Williams, do you know the defense attorney?” “Why, yes, I do,” she said. “I’ve known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. I used to baby-sit him. And he has also been a real disappointment to me. He’s lazy, bigoted, and he has a drinking problem. The man can’t build a normal relationship with anyone, and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him.” At this point, the judge rapped the courtroom to silence and called both lawyers to the bench. In a very quiet voice, he said, “If either of you asks if she knows me, I’ll throw you in jail!”

Sadly, adults sometimes do act badly. And that’s why we need to read the Bible and come to church, so that we can help people – and ourselves – be more like Jesus, be more like the people God wants us to be.

Two weeks ago, we looked at the earliest stages of becoming a Christian. At that stage, the most important thing to know is that God's arms are always open to you with that hug of salvation, as long as we keep reaching out to God, to become better and better Christians.

Last week, we saw that those who have been Christians for quite awhile – what we might call mature Christians – they need to continuously seek God's will, they need to stand strong in the power of God alone, and they need to prepare themselves daily to endure all things – the good, the bad and the boring – with patience, joy and thanksgiving

Today we are going to look at those who have been Christians all their adult lives. These are people who are well into their latter years, people who have spent their entire lives giving of themselves to the church, to their community and to the world in the name of Christ. And now, they can't give like they used to.

Maybe they have physical or financial limitations that keep them from giving like they use to, and they feel a little guilty. Or worse yet, they feel like they don't have anything to contribute to the church, their community and the world.

Paul has a special way of describing such people. He calls them "stewards of God's mysteries." These are people – many of them here today, and many more unable to be here – who have seen a lot of hard times, been through spiritual and emotional struggles like you can't believe.

Or maybe you can believe it – we've all been through hard times. But these are people who have been through them over and over again, seen countless others struggle and suffer, watched as the world tries – and fails – to achieve basic human decency. The thing is, the more life you live, the more hard times you see.

Now of course, the more life you live, the more good times you see, also: the birth of a new generation – children and grandchild growing and thriving – the end of wars and celebrations of peace, technological marvels that make life easier, and medical wonders that make life fuller.

But the truth is, with each of these great accomplishments comes unforeseen consequences, including more and more people living for years and years with disease and disability, often in nursing homes apart from family and friends.

What is a good and faithful Christian to make of that?!? It depends. It depends on whether that good and faithful Christian remains connected to the faith and mindful of the true promises of Christ. Jesus did not promise that life would be easy. But he did promise to be with us, especially through the hardest of times.

The Apostle Paul is one of the most faithful Christians you could meet. And you can meet him, in the pages of the Bible, and lots of people like him. I highly recommend it.

Paul, as one of the most faithful Christians you could meet, refers to himself and his brothers and sisters in ministry as “servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries.” As a steward of God’s mysteries, it was up to Paul to point out the unseen work of the Holy Spirit, to maintain faith that God will make all things right, and to live a quiet, humble life in service to Christ, which is the greatest blessing there is in life, and in death – proclaiming the Lord.

Being a steward of God’s mysteries is not easy. It’s particularly hard when we’re paying more attention to the work of the world than we do to the work of the Holy Spirit. We pay so much attention to worldly things that we can’t even see or hear the Holy Spirit working among us, trying to break through to us. Instead of trusting in God, we put our trust and hope in ourselves. And that leaves us destined to stagger around aimlessly, falling into one hole or another.

Or we let our lives become consumed by busyness and worry, rather than resting in the arms of Jesus, knowing that it will be OK. That frantic pace and worrisome attitude isn’t going to serve anybody well, and particularly not God. No, God is best served by a life built on a foundation of faith, when you first embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior.

God is best served by those who seek a mature faith, those who continuously seek God’s will, those who can face all things with patience, joy and thanksgiving.

God is best served by those who see themselves as stewards of God’s mysteries, those who can help others see and align themselves with the Holy Spirit, those who trust in God’s timing, those who embody the quite humility of Jesus.

We can each find ourselves somewhere along this pathway of discipleship – whether you are new to the faith, more mature in the faith, or a long-time keeper of the faith. The important thing is not where you are, but rather where you are going.

We can all be better Christians. That’s a lifelong process. And those who keep on the pathway of Christ, they will always find help along the way, they will surely grow in the knowledge of God’s will, and, when their time comes, they will rest assured of a life well lived, even as they continue to proclaim Christ, as humble stewards of the mysteries of our faith. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER - *From Saint Clement of Alexandria, 150-215*

Be kind to your little children, Lord; that is what we ask of you, as their Tutor, you the Father, Israel's guide

Grant that by doing what you told us to do, we may achieve a faithful likeness (of your) Image, and as far as is possible for us, (that we) may find in you a good God and a lenient Judge.

May we all live in the peace that comes from you. May we journey toward your city, sailing through the waters of sin untouched by the waves, (carried) tranquilly along by the Holy Spirit....

Night and day until the last day of all, may our praises give you thanks....”

We do give you thanks, O Lord, for your care and nurture of us, your children. And we pray for your care, grace and mercy upon those in need, and especially upon Ruth Lamb as she deals with the limitation of illness and disease.

We pray for those others we know who are in need, that you would be near to them, with comfort and strength.

We pray all this in your powerful name, and using the words that you taught us, saying together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**