

Arise and Come Away

St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church

8 Pentecost

Written and preached by the Rev. Susan Parsons¹

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

What sweet comforting words from Jesus

Sometimes when we roll up on Sunday morning

We find Jesus waving around a sword or

Causing trouble or telling odd stories that

Require some thought but

This morning we are reminded that

Jesus came to bring comfort and

Offers rest for the weary and heavy burdened

Jesus says there's not much we really have to do to

Receive this comfort

'I will *give* you rest' He says

Not you have to earn it or can achieve it

I will *give* it to you He says

His rest is always available to us of course but

To have that rest

To be able to feel that rest in our souls

We're going to have to

¹ The readings on which this sermon is based are found at the end of the sermon.

I ask your patience with regard to the layout of my sermons; they are laid out in a way that makes it easier for me to read aloud – not for the convenience of a reader - which may lead the silent reader to wonder if the writer had ever been apprised of the usefulness of punctuation.

Lay our burdens down
Sounds so good doesn't it
Jesus says 'Come on over here with me
Put down all that stuff your carrying and
Put on this pack of mine
It's light
It's got everything you need'

The problem is
Our burdens have become so much a part of us
We may not even recognize them as burdens or
Maybe we wouldn't recognize ourselves if we let them go
What would it be like not to worry about or
Try to control things we can't control
We are carrying around backpacks stuffed with
Beliefs and ideas that don't work anymore and
All those little pockets are filled with
Grudges and ancient hatreds but
They are so much a part of us we think we can't let them go
Some people seem to positively relish being burdened with
Never being wrong about anything or
With their suffering
What would it be like to just be
Content with what you have Jesus asks
You didn't like the spirituality of John
And you didn't like mine
You're never happy
Come with me take my back pack
It's light
Your burdens are heavy
Just leave them there in the dirt

Jesus says

That Rebekah could tell us a few things about letting go

Last week we heard about Isaac and

That little incident involving sacrifice

This week Isaac is grown and

In need of a wife but his dad Abraham

You may remember

Moved the family

Off to a foreign country because

He'd been told to by God and

They've settled in a place called Canaan

Isaac marrying a Canaanite is out of the question

- They're just a bunch of idol worshippers -

So a trusted servant is sent off to Isaac's homeland

To find a wife

Preferably a relative

The servant very wisely

Goes straight to a well near Abraham and Isaac's homeland because

There is a lot of 'wife finding' at wells

Jacob found Rachel at a well and

Moses met Zipporah at a well so

Chances are he thinks

A good wife for Isaac will be at a well

Sure enough there's Rebekah

Who it turns out is Isaac's cousin

The perfect match

Much has been made of how brave Abraham was to
Leave his homeland and set off to
God knows where but
We never hear about how
Brave Rebekah was when
She did exactly the same thing and
Under far more difficult circumstances
Abraham took his family with him
Rebekah left them behind
Let go of her mom and dad and sisters and brothers
Let go of her home of
Everything she knew and
Went off with only her servants as company to
God knows where and what
Decided after hearing the servant's story that
She would let go and follow God's lead
She could have held on of course
Waiting for another moment or
Clinging to her family until they and she
Were all burdened with it all
But she heard or saw God just like Abraham

This is another kind of letting go
The inevitable losses we suffer in life can become burdens
Unless we learn let go

We lose our childhood
We lose our innocence and
We lose someone supporting us
Eventually the losses are bigger
Our parents and friends and

Dreams of a perfect spouse
Of being a perfect parent
Our teeth
The ability to just stand up and walk effortlessly
These are losses that will become burdens
Unless we find a way of
Letting go of who and what used to be

And then there is sin
Paul loves to talk about sin and
In his letter to the Romans he writes about
How hard it is to resist sin
'I do not understand my own actions.
For I do not do what I want, but
I do the very thing I hate.
I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but
I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind'
Sin is a burden to let go of

We want things to be the way we want them to be
We want to know Jesus on our terms
We want to be in charge because
Our way of thinking makes sense to us
Another way of being is foreign
If we can just get beyond ourselves
Jesus will give us rest
He will work magic

Not long ago I would have said I was ok at letting go
I'd said goodbye to parents and a brother
Kids as they went off to college

A daughter when she got married
I've let go of ever making the big bucks and
Living in a big house unless it's a rest home and
Ever again being able to wear a bikini in public
I have given up or let go of all sorts of things that
Needed to be jettisoned

So when my younger daughter Diana
Became engaged last Christmas I knew the drill
She would be shifting her focus even more
To her fiancé Dan and his family her new family
I could handle that
I'd done it before
So when I went for a visit at the end of January
I made an effort to show her how
Good I could be at not needing a lot of attention
At giving her and Dan space
Diana and Dan had to work so
My sister came up from Virginia and
We made ourselves useful and
Kept ourselves busy and
Hung out with the kids at night when they got home and
I was just the picture of
Wise motherhood meeting the challenge of
Letting her darling baby girl go because
I knew first hand how good it can be to let go

Jesus wants us to lay down our heavy burdens
Whether they are sins or losses or control
Whatever it is because
It does just what He says it'll do

Bring rest to our souls
Which has the spiffy added dimension of
Bringing spiritual growth
I'm all for rest and spiritual growth
It feels good

But it was not a great visit
Diana and I were by the end of the week
Crabby and irritable with one another
And I couldn't think why
Diana and I rarely have problems getting along
When we finally sat down
To talk about our frustrations
When we began to compare notes
It was clear that my trying to show her how good I was at letting go Looked more like I
didn't care
She still wanted/needed her mother
Just in a different way
We were both trying to figure out
How to lose one another
Later we even realized that
We always had a little tiff over some stupid thing
When we have to let go of one another in some way

Letting go doesn't mean
Abandon or ignore or forget or to not care
It isn't doesn't mean blotting out memories or
Never again feeling bad
It means we are going to accept that invitation of Jesus and
Instead of hurrying past him
Loaded down with burdens stuffed

Into back packs the size of a small horse
We are going to 'come on over' to him
And lay our burdens down
And do it with as much grace as we can muster

There is comfort in coming to Jesus to God
It is a message repeated over and over in the Bible –
This is how God calls to us in the Song of Solomon
He says:

'Arise, my love, my fair one,
And come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come,
And the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom;
They give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one,
And come away.'

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 24: 34 - 38, 42 - 49, 58 - 67 (RCL)

(NRSV) So he said, "I am Abraham's servant. 35 The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys. 36 And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. 37 My master made me swear, saying, "You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Ca'naanites, in whose land I live; 38 but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.'

42 "I came today to the spring, and said, "O LORD, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! 43 I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, "Please give me a little water from your jar to drink," 44 and who will say to me, "Drink, and I will draw for your camels also"--let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master's son.'

45 "Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, "Please let me drink.' 46 She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, "Drink, and I will also water your camels.' So I drank, and she also watered the camels. 47 Then I asked her, "Whose daughter are you?' She said, "The daughter of Bethu'el, Na'hor's son, whom Mil'cah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms.

48 Then I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left."

58 And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." 59 So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes."

61 Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

62 Now Isaac had come from Be'er-la'hai-roi, and was settled in the Neg'eb. 63 Isaac went out in the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. 64 And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, 65 and said to the servant, "Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took her veil and covered herself. 66 And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. 67 Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Song of Solomon 2: 8 - 13 (alt. to Ps. 45 for RCL)

Song 2:8 (NRSV) The voice of my beloved!

Look, he comes,

leaping upon the mountains,
bounding over the hills.

9 My beloved is like a gazelle
or a young stag.

Look, there he stands
behind our wall,

gazing in at the windows,
looking through the lattice.

10 My beloved speaks and says to me:
"Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away;

11 for now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.

12 The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come,
and the voice of the turtledove
is heard in our land.

13 The fig tree puts forth its figs,
and the vines are in blossom;
they give forth fragrance.

Arise, my love, my fair one,
and come away.

NEW TESTAMENT: Romans 7: 15 - 25a (RCL)

(NRSV) {The Inner Conflict} For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

GOSPEL: Matthew 11: 16 - 19, 25 - 30 (RCL)

(NRSV) "But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

17 "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;
we wailed, and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon"; 19 the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

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