

Homily for 5 July 2020  
Romans 7:15-25a; Matt 11:16-19, 25-30

There's a lot I try to guess each week.

I try to guess or gather which of the Bible readings might be striking your attention, leaving you with questions, or feeling most helpful.

That relates to my guess or hunch of what's on your thoughts through the week, and for the next week, and in this particular moment.

Are you thinking about the holiday weekend? And, if so, are you enjoying plans and celebrations? Or missing fireworks? Giving a salute of patriotism, or lamenting the Indigenous and Black lives at the expense of which these United States exist?

Or are you thinking most about the coronavirus? And, if so, is that because of restrictions on life, or because of anxiety about death, or because of all the uncertainty you're left with, or judgmentalism against those not wearing masks and causing the spread, or questioning your own habits, or for worry about vulnerable communities? I try to figure out what is hitting you each week—the virus and other realities—as you prepare to receive this word.

Today, I also wonder if you are focused on the hymns, and maybe are self-conscious about singing at home with less ability to join or get lost in congregational song? Or remembering favorites? Or maybe there's a message to share about the hymns that fits this day and finds application in your life.

I could tell you that the writer of our next hymn (ELW 817) was a Spanish priest who served as a chaplain for cyclists. (Which, I assume, means bicyclists, and is surprisingly disappointing to me, since it would actually have more appeal to be a chaplain to a motorcycle gang). If that fact doesn't especially resonate with you, maybe it would be helpful to share that the hymn has been translated into over 80 languages, even though it's less than 50 years old. That international feeling may be a reminder not to over-Anglicize this 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend.

Or there's the perennial MCC favorite, "This is My Song" (887). As I prepare each week, I find myself wondering things like how it would strike you that the Methodist minister who wrote the words to that hymn opposed nuclear weapons. Would that kind of detail about her matter to you?

My professor Paul Westermeyer says about the hymn: "This is a remarkably apt hymn to begin [the "national songs"] section of the hymnal [...since] though the Christian faith encourages citizens to hold deep allegiances to their respective countries, it also refuses to allow those allegiances to be idolatrous and is committed to the welfare of all citizens of the world."<sup>\*</sup>

But I also realize you may not want to have to contemplate catastrophe and the ethics of nuclear warfare on a Sunday morning. You may well prefer to dwell in "Yes, Jesus loves me" (ELW 595). And I won't argue with that. Jesus said God has "hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and revealed them to infants," so this best-loved Sunday School hymn may be just the way to offer comfort and sweetness.

And actually, that is my primary goal: to give you good news. To share some comfort. To help you know that God is for you, that Jesus is for you. Yes, Jesus loves you. That's the main thing. Since you are weary and heavy-burdened. That actual word for "weary" related to doing hard work with difficulties and trouble, and had a figurative meaning of being discouraged, emotionally fatigued, and losing heart.<sup>\*\*</sup> I suspect you're no stranger to weariness in these days, and you relate to discouraging difficulties and tiring troubles. And so I suppose you're eager for whatever might offer to lighten that load, and I hope you hear goodness in Jesus' invitation.

But still stuck in the efforts of your hard work, I'd guess you got hung up on the Romans reading, and may need to have that bad news sorted out before you can hear Jesus as good news.

Romans seems to have a pretty bleak outlook on our abilities. You may be there already, wishing you could do better. Or you may be feeling pretty good about yourself and sort of be offended that it

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<sup>\*</sup> *Hymnal Companion to Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p774

<sup>\*\*</sup> <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/matt11x16.htm>

would describe you that way, or else bothered at that outlook on humanity. You may look at the headlines and not be surprised at a dour assessment of human nature and our sinfulness and the amount of evil we perpetrate. Even if you feel broadly positive about humankind, still I know there are individuals with whom you have a hard time, about whom it's just plain tough to think nice thoughts or see them in a kind light.

Romans isn't just for the clinically pathological. When it talks about "selfish desires," you likely have your own things that come to mind—indulgent purchases or treats that lure you in. There's likely also something you attribute to others, again perhaps the young adults in bars without masks as an example of selfish desire. I'd say Romans also could hit on entrenched white privilege; we know it's not right or good, but still we find it nearly impossible to do much of anything about it.

Though I don't want you to be too depressed and plagued by saying "what a miserable person I am" or fixated on Amazing Grace's version of "a wretch like me," I do hope you can be honest and not whitewash it. From problematic peccadilloes to institutionalized systems, these are, indeed, heavy burdens we carry as individuals and as a country. It is hard work, with difficulties and troubles, leading reasonably to fatigue and discouraged emotions.

The point of Romans is that that's not the end of the story, and the other point is that you don't need a lecture or wagging finger to work up worries. Simply telling you to be less selfish actually backfires and makes you more self-obsessed. What's the answer, then? Romans asks.

Jesus says, "Come to me. I will give you rest." This is the rest of sabbath, of creation's fullness and completion, living as it should be. This is the way between sinner and saint, of feeling less immobilized than invigorated. You become not a prisoner controlled by sin, but a prisoner of hope, yoked to Jesus, tied to him, in step with his work for the world. By the end of the next chapter, Romans will come around to assure you that nothing will separate you from the love of God.

Simply put, whatever work you've been up to and however that's been going, Jesus has come to call you and invite you. However successful you feel or how miserable and weary this week, yes, Jesus loves you.