



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
5 July 2026

Ascension Lutheran Church
Rev. Christian W. Marien

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

My wife put the dishes away last week. In a perfect world, our children would remember to empty the dishwasher or at the very least do it the first time they are asked. But last week – it was my wife. I did not think anything of it until I opened the cupboard to pull out a plate and saw that for the first time in thirteen years – the plates and the bowls had switched places. Is it a big deal? No. Did the whole routine shift in the kitchen? Yes. I mean for thirteen years I have opened the left cabinet and pulled out a plate. And now -when I open the left cabinet there are only bowls. The plates have moved to the right cabinet. I thought about switching them back, but I had a lot more fun reflecting on the shift in routine and what that meant every single time I opened the left cabinet – still expecting a bowl – and finding a plate. And then when the kids opened the cabinet and I heard them say, “Mom, where are the bowls?” And I smiled and thought, “mission accomplished, we have upset their whole world view and now, how will they cope?” I mean they could just open the other side of the cabinet and find the bowls, but the easiest thing to do is yell and wait to see if mom responds, right? Next week – we are moving all the glasses to the cabinet on the other side of the kitchen. It is possible that our family will die of thirst before they find the new hiding place for the glasses.

I share all of that to speak to the fact that we are happier in our routines or at least more comfortable in those routines than we are prepared to seek a new understanding. Hear what Jesus says today, *“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.* There is a moment today where Jesus thanks God the Father for hiding spiritual truths from those who believe they know more than God or at least claim themselves equal to God. When Jesus takes the moment to point out our prideful self-sufficiency over the truth of our dependence on God. Anybody been there? How often, we believe it is easier to go it alone than it is to ask someone else, let alone God, for help. There are more stories than I care to share about needing to ask for help after attempting to go it alone. Adding oil to the lawnmower but pouring the oil into gas tank. Listening for the sump pump in the basement realizing that the water was not going down but coming up and praying the rain would stop until Pastor Tony could come over and replace the pump that died. Praying to God that there would be enough fumes in the gas tank for me to get to the gas station – telling the story and finding out, from many of you, I might have as much as 60 miles still to drive before the tank really runs out of gas. Suffering through ER visit after ER visit for eight years before finally deciding to have my pancreas removed. So many of you reminding me of my own words, “that you will feel so much better after the surgery.” It still sounds better when I say it to you. Tearing out the master bathroom tile early in our marriage only to find out that replacing the tile ourselves would cost a lot more in patience than extra tiles that kept breaking without a water saw to cut them correctly. There is no shortage of “I tried to do it myself” stories while realizing I needed not only God but many of you over the past 16 years. Which is why, when Jesus offers the invitation to the weary and burdened today, I have to stop and listen.

²⁸ *“Come to me, all you who 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.”* How many times I have come to those words for comfort,



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for someone else, for myself. Last week we shared them at Pastor Tony's sabbatical blessing – a reminder that Jesus is the author of our rest as much as Jesus is the author of our salvation. And no matter how often I hear those words, they are anything but routine to me.

On this 250th anniversary of our independence as a nation, I am reminded of another author's words that are anything but routine to me. Inscribed on a plaque, on an inside wall of the base of the Statue of Liberty in the waters off of New York City, the words of poet Emma Lazarus, *"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"* Originally written for an art auction to fund the building of the pedestal base that the statue of liberty stands on. Emma Lazarus was involved in aiding Jewish refugees to New York who had fled antisemitic pogroms in eastern Europe and she saw a way to express her empathy for these refugees in terms of the statue. How many pictures have we seen of ships carrying immigrants who catch sight of the Statue of Liberty entering the waters of the coast of this nation? No doubt, many of us can share stories of great-grandparents, grandparents, parents even who found their way to this country by way of Ellis Island or at the very least a port within view of the Statue of Liberty. None of them would have known those words were waiting for them upon their arrival to this country. Yet, those words held the promise of hope, safety, welcome, possibility in a new land every single immigrant hoped to claim as their new homeland. That has always been a source of pride for my citizenship in this country. Even though, I know I have plenty of colleagues who would prefer I talk about our citizenship in heaven – yes, yes, of course. Funny, how I never take my citizenship in heaven for granted but in this nation, I sometimes wonder if the welcome is still the beacon of light beside the golden door it once was.

And yet, we know, the beacon of light that is the United States continues still to shine. People around the world, still look to this nation for hope, promise, a future. Yes, we have our struggles. Not all of us have houses on the beach – like so many people used to think when I told them I was born and raised in California. Why did you leave your house on the beach? What? Because in Wisconsin -everyone owns cows and makes cheese? Or something like that? I still hunger for this country to be a nation of equality where all are equal – where life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is available to every individual, citizen and immigrant alike, without disdain for someone's heritage or pathway to citizenship. Yes, I would be grateful for an orderly entrance into this great land and struggle that the people who govern, democrat and republican alike, seem to struggle with how to make the process of immigrant to citizen so complex and inaccessible. In my family, the story is told of my grandfather, who emigrated to this country when he was two years old. Upon arrival at a port in New York City, his older brother was found to have an eye infection, which almost derailed the entire family from entrance into this nation. How I am grateful for a doctor who witnessed the tired, the poor, the huddled mass of my grandfather's family from Scotland and overlooked the illness to grant them entry.

So when I read the words, "Come to me all you who are weary, and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Those words speak to the hard pieces of my heart. A reminder that, I too, am in need of rest – that I cannot do it all on my own. Perhaps that is why the words inscribed on the Statue of Liberty speak to me so honestly this day. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." This



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country has known freedom, from monarch and dictator alike, longer than most.” And this weekend, we can stop and honor the great gift that is this nation, not out of routine but out of promise, remembering this nation, and our citizenship in this nation, brings also our responsibility to keep the great lamp shining beside the golden door for others to find their way. What does Jesus say, “For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” It turns out that Jesus spoke of the weight of the burden we bear. I wonder if only for today we might step out of our routine, so that we can speak not of the burden being light but of the light as our burden to bear – for all the world to see so that we, by the grace of God, may continue to point others towards the light of the path to freedom - in this life and in the life to come. Amen.