**What a Friend we have in Jesus**

What a Friend we have in Jesus. This is one of my favorite hymns. I love the way American singer-songwriter Alan Jackson sings it in his very low voice. I was not blessed with a beautiful voice. I have his CD and I will admit, I sing along with Alan in my car when no one is listening. Sometimes I forget that someone is always listening. God is always listening and here for us. He meets us just as we are, right now.

Let’s think about the first verse:

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
And what a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

We are human. We all have faults. We have experienced grief, feeling like our hearts have been torn to shreds. We were never promised that life on earth would be perfect, that everything would always go our way and that we would never suffer. Life on earth was not easy for Jesus, and indeed he did suffer. He released us from the burden of our sins by giving us an opportunity to follow his ways. We all have the privilege to share our concerns with God and ask for his guidance. We need to be realistic about our expectations. God answers prayers, just not always the way we expect him to, and if we listen, really listen, God may be asking us to take some action. I remember my mom telling me when I was very young that God helps those who help themselves. This can be a little frightening sometimes, but have faith, and trust and continue to bring your deepest concerns to God. It is worth the effort.

According to Jeremiah 29, vs. 11-13 (NIV), “I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me with all your heart.”

The second verse goes like this:

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
Oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer

John 15 talks about the keys to peace Jesus can offer and it is not what we expect. His peace is ‘never leaving us’ In John 14: 27, he says,“I am leaving you with a gift-peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

Wow! How does one respond to this? I’m sure you can think of numerous examples where someone has told you not to be afraid (a new school, a new job, medical tests, cancer treatment, war in the Ukraine). There are so many things in life we cannot control, and as the hymn goes, “Oh, what peace we often forfeit”. We trouble our hearts with so many things that are out of our hands. Sometimes, all we can do is pray. And I mean this with utmost sincerity. We have witnessed miracles in our lifetime. Prayers are sometimes where we go as a last resort. They should be our first stop. A simple prayer. A prayer in numbers. We’ve seen in this congregation that prayers work!!!

Oh, what needless pain we bear. I’d like to read you something from the book “5 Minutes with Jesus” by Sheila Walsh:

**“I want you to imagine that it’s Sunday morning and you’re headed to church. You’d very nearly bailed. You’ve just been feeling so tired and discouraged lately. But you’d poured some coffee into a travel mug and headed out. The radio station is playing a familiar song…the hope-filled lyrics seemed a bit out of reach. As you navigate the parking lot looking for those last few coveted spots, you watch families heading into the sanctuary, apparently carefree. You pick up your Bible and your purse, put on your best Sunday smile, and followed them. Suddenly you feel this weight pulling on you. You look down and all the baggage from your life-the stuff you’ve been carrying inside for years—has become visible. And it’s not easy to look at.**

**Fear**

**Shame**

**Insecurity**

**Disappointment**

**Regret**

**…and more. It’s all there!**

**Panicking and not sure what to do, you look around and see that everyone else has baggage too. Everyone is weighed down by things they’ve been trying to bury for a long time. Then the service starts, so you just drag your stuff to your seat and sit down. You hear a voice coming from the front of the church. It’s not your pastor’s voice: in fact he is sitting at the edge of the platform., weighted down like everyone else. You realize that it’s Jesus speaking.**

**“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light. (Matthew 11: 28-30)**

**These words are met with silence.**

**Then an older man stands up, drags his bag to the front, and leaves it there. A young couple does the same thing. More and more people begin to drag their baggage to the feet of Jesus and leave it there. Will you go too? Will you take Christ up on this amazing exchange? You don’t have to carry your baggage for one more minute!**

This story was quite a visual for me. No one is immune to baggage. I read that Prince Harry and Prince William had been carrying the grief of losing their mom around for over a decade all tucked inside them. We are all human, and we all have baggage.

The third verse goes like this:

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged
Take it to the Lord in prayer

There are addictions: drugs, alcohol, gambling, food. If the doctor tells us to go on a fat-free diet, is it easy? Aren’t we still enticed by that New York style cheesecake with strawberries on top? Wait! I’m allergic to strawberries. In my case it would be cherries. Do we justify indulging by claiming it can’t be bad for us if there’s fruit in it? And what about temptations to break rules, thinking that doesn’t apply to me? Or “it’s not like I’m hurting anyone”. Excuses sometimes abound. Sometimes we do things that we shouldn’t. We eat that cheesecake. We break rules. But, when that happens, ‘we should never be discouraged’, We can take those thoughts to the Lord in prayer and keep trying to do better each day. God meets us right here, right now. Understand consequences. Keep learning.

And the last verse:

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful? I remember talking to my kids about Jesus and God when they grew up in this church and the many conversations I had with the children when I taught Sunday School here. There were many important lessons on being a kind person and doing the right things. Prayer, sometimes was a harder concept. I always explained that if you’re not sure what the right thing to do is, or you have a decision to make or a friend that is hurting, you can trust Jesus and pray. You may have family and friends that are not close by to talk to. There may be times in your life where you feel all alone. But you are never alone. I had this discussion with my daughter Holly when she and her boyfriend moved to Colorado. Subsequent to their moving to Colorado, she and her boyfriend broke up, and she found herself in Boulder all alone. Her heart was troubled, but she was not ready to come home. We talked from a distance, but a greater part of her day was alone. I told her: this is the time I talked to you about when you were young. Have faith, take it to the Lord in prayer. She lived in Colorado for 11 years, until her recent move to Texas. She persevered and I am so proud of her. As she was praying from Boulder about her circumstances, I was praying from West Bridgewater.

There are so many ways to pray and however you choose to pray, Jesus will be meet youexactly where you are on your life’s journey. You can pray from the warmth of your own bed at night or sitting in a pew at church. You can pray from a park bench, or a hospital bed. If you can’t bear the burden of the prayer at that moment or unsure of the action you need to take to resolve a dilemma, create a God box. I’ve done this. Write your prayer on a piece of paper and put it in the God Box and try to clear your mind of it for a moment. God knows what your prayers are, and he also knows the answers that are best for you.

I leave you today with Matthew 11: 28

Jesus said “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest.