

**The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – October 24, 2021 – Revealed
Psalm 145:8-14 and Matthew 11:25-30**

Our family has two dogs. Tate, the oldest, is a Double Doodle. He's half Poodle, a quarter Labrador, and a quarter Golden Retriever. Tate follows his nose wherever it leads him, which, when he is indoors, is straight to the kitchen. He's what we call a food ninja.

In his younger years, Tate used to stride ride up to the counter, or the dining room table, and attempt to take our daily bread by force. But age and wisdom have changed his strategy, and he now waits patiently in the wings for us to forget that he's even there. Then, as soon as our attention wanes, he sneaks into position and swiftly but carefully tip toes into place, hoping to go unnoticed. Like a predator in the wild, most of Tate's "hunts" are unsuccessful. Yet, even the occasional success is enough to maintain his interest.

Apple, the youngest, is a Bichon Frise. That's French for "curly haired small dog," which sums things up pretty well. A Bichon's coat is soft and white. And, true to her breed, she is affectionate, energetic, and stubborn. We purchased Apple at the beginning of the pandemic, with the threat of an extended lockdown looming. Like

many people across the country, we sensed that the timing was right for a joyful distraction.

Now, any pet owner will tell you how laborious and expensive it is to care for an animal. Which begs the question, why do we do it? Why do we invite these dependent, messy creatures into our homes, and spend all of this time grooming them, and walking them, and cleaning up after them? Isn't it all just a burden?

Well, yes, it is. But, curiously, pets relieve burdens too. Studies show that time spent petting an animal can decrease blood pressure and make people feel more at ease. People enjoy the companionship that these animals bring. We like watching them run and play. And they also make us feel less lonely. Oftentimes, folks have told me that their pet gives them the opportunity to talk to someone, which is especially meaningful to them following the death of a spouse.

And my children? You should just see the look on their faces when the “curly haired small dog” pounces into their laps and gives them all of the love that she has. Many of our pets have a way of expressing their appreciation using their whole bodies. They're very kinesthetic. And as they wear their emotions for us daily, we recognize what a tremendous void there would be without them in our lives.

In our second lesson this morning, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” We all know that life can be burdensome. And we all know what it’s like to feel beleaguered in mind, body, or spirit. Our minds race and wander. Our bodies ache. And our spirits cry out for some relief. The Psalmist describes these challenges well in the 13th chapter, writing, “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?”

It’s human nature, in other words, to long for a ministry of presence, of wholeness, of comfort and support in our lives. To discover reminders that we are valued. To receive the assurance that we are not alone. And this is part of the reason that we return to the church time and time again, for this is the good news we find in Jesus.

You see, the burdens that we bear and the obstacles that we face do not have the final say. Even in death, we proclaim the hope of resurrection life. And so, amid every tribulation in this world, we keep our eyes on the prize – that is, God’s presence in this life and in the life to come.

Following our worship today, I will have only two more Sundays with you as your pastor. I recognize that, as I depart, some of you will likely feel burdened. Because there were so many things in the life of the church that I was attending to on a regular basis that will now fall to others.

Then, in addition to the day-to-day operations of the church in the short-term, there are questions about what is to come. At times like these, it is easy to feel stressed and anxious, overwhelmed in the present and equally worried about what will happen in the future. But I wish to assure you that your Session and the elected leadership of this congregation are planning and preparing for this transition, and they are committed to serving this church.

Your Session also rightly feels the weight of responsibility on their shoulders. And, at every point along the way, they are going to need some support. Some encouragement. Some offers to be of assistance. Some relief. You see, sometimes burdens are lifted and prayers are answered when *we* become the hands and feet of Jesus for someone else. And, in those moments, the goodness of God is revealed.

Our stewardship campaign for the coming year is rapidly drawing to a close. And with this in mind, I wish to give thanks to each of you for your faithful

commitment to Westminster. I have been exceedingly grateful for continued financial and volunteer support in the midst of the pandemic. And at a time when I feared that support would be withdrawn because we were not meeting in-person, you continued to be the church.

As you prepare for your ministry, I ask you to consider the weight and burden that both your next pastor and the Session will feel if there are gaping holes in the budget, and if the many servants in this congregation take a wait-and-see approach before offering to give generously of their time and talent.

I encourage you to not let that happen and, instead, to recognize that this is the moment when burdens can be lifted. For what you are doing now will set the tone for an entire year. Friends, I implore you to lift one another's burdens. And, when the burden becomes too great, to remember that you are God's. That you are held in a loving embrace. So do good. Be the church. And wear your calling with gladness. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.