

Hebrews 4:1-16

Pentecost 22 Midweek + Proper 24B + October 24, 2018

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

Rest

The Word of the Lord from Hebrews 4:9: "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God." This is the Word of the Lord.

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

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He did it in six days, says Genesis 1; and on each of those days, there was evening and morning; and each day ended as evening came. The Lord created man, Adam and Eve, on the sixth day; and with the creation of man, He declared creation finished. He called it good.

There was one more day of the week to go – the seventh day. On the seventh day, God rested from His labors because His labors for the week were done. There's something interesting about the seventh day in Genesis 1: unlike the first six days, evening never came. It's as if the day never ended. It's a sweet and subtle proclamation that the rest of God remains forever.

When the Lord brought the Israelites out of Egypt as His chosen people, He commanded them, "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy." No one in Israel was to work on the seventh day, the Sabbath Day. It was a day of rest as God had rested from His labors. It was a day to hear His Word. It was a day to trust that He would provide for them richly, even if they were forfeiting one-seventh of the week's daylight where they could be getting things done.

The people weren't good at keeping anything holy; and as we noted last week, nearly all who followed Moses out of Egypt rebelled against the Lord and doubted His love and promises. Therefore, as the Lord recounts in Psalm 95, He declared, "They shall never enter into My rest." So the Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness, wandering and waiting – waiting for the last of the disobedient people who came out of Egypt to die, because God had declared that they would not cross the Jordan. They would not enter the Promised Land.

Nor would they enter His rest.

The Promised Land was not the rest of God: as our text says, "If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on." No, the rest of God was something else; in fact, while the Promised Land was a great gift, it was really only a reminder of God's gift of rest to come.

To rest with God is to be in His presence, without sin. Sin brought strife between man and God: when man chose sin and became unholy, he made himself an enemy of God. This is what Scripture calls those who do not trust in Christ. It may sound harsh: very few non-Christians that I know consider themselves to be God's enemies. But let us put it this way: opposing armies often only feel enmity for the other at the time of battle. When they are safe at home and away from the front line, the hostility is not near as fervent as when they are face-to-face. (I would wager, for instance, that a soldier in Afghanistan is far more aware of Taliban hostility than you and me in Boise.) It is so with those who do not trust in Jesus: they might well consider themselves friends of God until they are face-to-face with Him on the Last Day; then, as they see their sin in contrast to His holiness, they will not want to rest anywhere near God. They will want to get away; it is why, in Revelation, kings and rulers on the Last Day call upon the mountains to fall on them rather than be in the presence of God.

The hope of the Christian is the rest of God. That is to live in the blessed certainty that God holds nothing against you, and so you are at peace with the Lord of life. That is the rest of God, your only hope; and to borrow the Lord's words from our Gospel lesson, "With man it is impossible, but not with God; for with God, all things are possible."

In the fullness of time, God did the impossible: He made His rest possible for us. He did so through extraordinary and sacrificial love. The Son of God became flesh, became man. He lived a life at peace with His Father in heaven because He was without sin. Then, for us and for our salvation, He submitted Himself to death on the cross – and His cross was anything but the rest of God. On that cross, He willingly bore the sins of the world and suffered the judgment for it. At that cross, God the Father said to God the Son, "You are as far from 'at peace' with Me as you can be, for I declare You guilty of all the sin that makes mankind My enemy." So on the cross, Jesus suffered that rest-less hell so that you might have heaven. On the cross, Jesus suffered the wrath of God so that you might have the rest of God.

Don't forget what day He died on, by the way. It was Friday, the sixth day of the week. In the holy week of creation, God created Adam on the sixth day. In the holy week of redemption, says Romans 5, the second Adam – Jesus – died for the sins of the first Adam and all of his descendants. On the seventh day of creation, God rested because the work was finished. On the cross before He died, Jesus declared "It is finished" – He declared that the work of redemption was done. He was laid in the tomb for the seventh day, the day of rest, for there was nothing more to do to win salvation for the world.

So Christ has died and Christ is risen from the dead.

Therefore, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For you.

You haven't reached the Promised Land yet. You're somewhere in the wilderness. You've been delivered from slavery – not slavery to Egypt, but slavery to sin and death. You're on your way to the Promised Land of heaven, and the key word there is "Promised." The Lord has promised that heaven is yours for the sake of Jesus; because for the sake of Jesus, you are at rest, at peace with God.

This is important: even though you're still in this troubled wilderness, you are already at peace with God. Because of the cross, He doesn't hold your sins against you. He says, "I am at peace with you for the sake of Jesus; and so I will shepherd you, save you and use all things for your good."

You already have rest with God, and so eternal rest in heaven is yours. It is not something you have to earn or attain, because it is already given. You heard it given to Sofia Violetta this evening, for the Lord declared, "Sofia, I baptize you in My name." She is already at rest with God. She may not give much rest to her parents, but she is already at rest with God.

Every temptation of the devil, then, is to get you to throw away the priceless gift that is already yours. This is what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness: the Promised Land was already theirs, but along the way they opted to disobey the Lord and turn to other gods. It is the same for you: that is why our epistle tells you to "strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." By the grace of God, be on guard. Examine yourself for any doubt or sin that you would hold onto, that would leave you dead and lost from the rest of God.

So that you might have life, the Lord gives you all that you need: He gives you His Word. And "the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word of God exposes your sin – not so that you run and hide or call for mountains to bury you, but so that you might confess them and be forgiven. And that Word delivers to you the forgiveness of God – it renews your peace with Him. It is spoken with water to drown your old Adam and raise you up a new creation in Christ. It is spoken with bread and wine to deliver Jesus – body, blood and all – to you; and if Jesus is with

you, then you have rest with God. (No wonder, just before the Supper, the pastor turns to you and says, "The *peace* of the Lord be with you always!" For if God gives you His peace, you are at rest with Him forever.)

I remember a professor in college who said more than once, "The older I get, the better eternal rest sounds." Indeed, it is good to look forward to an eternity where we are freed from the thorns and thistles and every last curse that sin brings. In the meantime, you rejoice, because the Sabbath rest of God is already yours, even now, for the sake of Jesus. You are at peace with God, because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen