

Ben Libby

Sermon

November 15th, the 24th Sunday after Pentecost | Second to Last

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. AMEN. Our sermon text this morning comes from Hebrews, chapter 4, starting at verse 9.

**So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God rested from his work. 11 Therefore, let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience. 12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the point of dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, even being able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account.**

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...Mercy, Grace, and Peace ARE YOURS from your God and Father and your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

What is restful for you? Is it getting out into nature and resting among the hiking trails and mountains? Is it simply sitting on your couch to watch football on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon? Perhaps it is sitting down and diving into a new book that you happen to find restful. We all rest in different ways.

But isn't there objective rest? Isn't there something that gives us all rest no matter who we are? Isn't a good night's sleep restful no matter who you are? You really can't function when you don't sleep. You don't really know how much you need sleep until you don't get it. This is something that I learned when my first child was born, and it is something that I am reminded of to a lesser degree these days as well.

Not only do our bodies need rest, but even more so our souls need rest. While there are many different vacations you can take to give your bodies rest, there is only one place you can go to give your soul rest. It is only in Jesus where we find a resting place for our souls. We find rest here when we come before the throne of God to offer Him worship and praise in this sanctuary. And ultimately we will find rest in Jesus when we stand before the heavenly throne of God into eternity. And so we pray - MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS

BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN!!!-

As most of you know, we undertook the project of replacing the parsonage roof this week. We had estimates from several companies offering to do this for us. But we saw that we could pay about 1/3 of what those companies were asking for if we did it ourselves. Pastor Teifel offered to come down from Lynnwood to help us with this, and others also volunteered both time and travel to help us with the roof. Most of us who helped with the roof this week also had helped Pastor Tiefel replace roofs years ago in Wisconsin, so we had some previous experience doing this.

Even though we had past experience, we all learned some new things quickly. I myself learned that I am not as young as I used to be. In the past, sure it was hard work, but I would bounce back. Now, I cannot remember ever being this sore as I am after this week. I also learned that I am out of shape. Years ago, when I did this somewhat regularly, it wasn't a big deal. Now, my work is different. I am a stranger to physical labor. This roof has taught me just how physical roofing can be, and my body wasn't prepared for it.

This whole week has been a good object lesson for me on what real rest is. We all get tired all the time. It isn't just physical labor that makes us yearn for rest. No matter who you are or what you do, eventually you need to rest. If you did something all the time nonstop, you would break down. We all need to take a break, to rest, if we want to continue working later at optimal levels.

The writer to the Hebrews, in this section of scripture, is talking about rest as well. If you read Hebrews 3 and 4, you will see that word all over. It is his main topic here. He says, **So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God rested from his work.**

Even though the term "rest" is used throughout the section, what the writer calls a **Sabbath rest** here is very unique. It is a greek word found nowhere else in the Bible. It is more literally translated, "Sabbath Celebration".

To me, there is quite a big difference between "resting" and "celebrating". If you want to know the difference between the two concepts, just look ahead a few weeks down the calendar. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Newyears will be here before you know it. The holidays are many things, but restful is not the first word that comes to mind. Do we have time off from work? Sure. But getting together and celebrating them is not always restful. Even though we may not be working, it doesn't mean that we are resting. The holidays are considered to be one of the most stressful times in the year.

A sabbath celebration is a unique term, but the concept is anything but. It is an all encompassing idea, one that can be witnessed here today in church, and one that points ahead to an everlasting celebration. The way that we keep the sabbath is much different now then it was for the Jews of the Old Testament. Luther explains how we are to remember the Sabbath day as "We should fear and love God that we do not despise His Word and the preaching of it but we should regard God's Word as holy and gladly hear and learn it."

Even though there were many other regulations that went along with the Jews observing the Sabbath day, the core principle remains the same. We observe the rest that God took on the seventh day of the first week of all time. When we come to church, we celebrate the Sabbath. It is a day of rest. This doesn't mean that we have to refrain from working. Rather, it is the day that we receive an even greater rest. It is the rest that Jesus was talking about in our Gospel reading: **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Matthew 11:28-29**

When God rested, it didn't mean that He was done. He was done with the work of creation. But just because He was done *creating* didn't mean He was done with His *creation*. He has an active relationship with all of it still to this day. He continues to preserve and protect His creation.

But His ultimate act of preservation would be witnessed later. When Jesus went to the cross on Good Friday, that was the real beginning of the ultimate Sabbath Celebration. There was no more work to be done on the redemption front. It was finished, and then Jesus rested His holy body in the tomb. But even though it was finished, that was not the end. Christ was then raised for our justification, and ascended into heaven so that He could reign at the right hand of God and one day come again. Our redemption has now been secured. What is finished remains finished forever!

(ISLAND) You cannot improve a masterpiece. When Jesus died on the cross and rose the third day, mankind's salvation was secured. There is nothing we can do to improve upon it! Yet, we always do to do so. We try to improve our salvation when we add our own works to the justification equation. But they do not belong there! All that does is take away from the beauty of God's mercy and grace. It would be like trying to improve the mona lisa through means of finger painting. Or like adding a chapter to a Dickens novel using only the vocabulary of "See Spot Run". Adding our works into the equation of salvation only

provides terrible results and marres the beauty of God's masterpiece of Christ's work of atonement.

But, to those who trust in the works of Christ alone, they are the ones who find real rest. They are the ones who can truly celebrate! **10 For the one who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God rested from his work. 11 Therefore, let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall into the same pattern of disobedience.**

This is somewhat of what is known as Biblical irony. "make every effort to enter rest " seems like an oxymoron. One doesn't strive to rest, making an effort to rest is the opposite of resting, isn't it?

The reason this seems contradictory is because we are people of contradictory natures. We know that we are sinful and deserve hell. We also know that we are declared righteous by Jesus Christ and are destined to go to heaven. We know that we are justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law. We also know that faith without works is dead. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God. We also know that we can expect to be abused, mistreated, and possibly even killed for our love of God. We believers are quite the contradictory bunch.

Thankfully, there is a reason to our madness. It is called the Word of God! We strive to rest because while we know we can rest from the guilt of sins, we also know that the devil does not rest, rather he prowls and roars like a lion, seeking those whom he might devour.

We know this from the WORD. We have been given this Word of God to curb our sinful habits, to show us our faults, and to show us how to live a life of love for Him. We strive to rest, that is, even though we enjoy a sabbath celebration now, we are still eager to experience a rest that is never ending!

(ISLAND) Do you know what else is contradictory? Fixing ourselves by doing nothing. Sometimes a good night's sleep is all it takes to cure what ails you. Sometimes. Other times other steps are required. You know what doesn't make a lot of sense? Being cut open in order to be healed! Surgery seems like

something that would be hurtful instead of helpful. But, God has blessed us with modern medicine and now we are able to operate on even the most dire of conditions.

But no matter what advances may come, nothing could be done about our inoperable sin. You can't cut out something that permeates our whole being. No surgeon blade could ever do anything to remove your sin from your soul. But God's Word can!

**12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the point of dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, even being able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account.**

We usually think of a double edge sword as a phrase meaning something has benefits but also carries with it disadvantages. That is not what the Word of God is. Some interrupt this passage to mean that the Word is both the Law and the Gospel. This is true, the Word does contain both of these great teachings. But that is not what the writer to the Hebrews is going for here. He is merely comparing the sharpness of God's word to the sharpness of a double edged sword.

A different way to translate and think about this word and concept is "a double edge knife". Think about a surgeon's scalpel, but even sharper and wielded by God Himself. That is what the Word is. It penetrates much deeper and much more precisely than any earthly tool. And He does this without killing us! Instead, it heals us and makes us whole.

Yet the end of those verses is a terrifying thought, at least at face value. **no creature hidden from him, but everything is uncovered and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we will give an account.** Everyone is exposed to God. He sees all. We do not see Him visibly yet, but He sees us. And of course He does. How else do you suppose we have gotten to this point in our lives? Without God's careful and watchful eye, we would not be here today.

But the point is taken. Everyone will one day have to give an account to God. This is frightening for sinners. But God's Word shows us that we will not stand alone on that day. We will have Jesus on our side. He will plead our case. He surely will not point to our various good deeds, because they have nothing to do with our salvation. Instead He will point to Himself. He will say that He did it all for us, and therefore we deserve to be with Him in heaven. This is how we will get our final rest!

You don't know what real rest is until you don't get it. The same can be said about the rest we will receive when we go to heaven. We know what the idea of rest is on this earth. We have a taste of it when we come to church, when we open up our bibles, and when we receive the peace that it is not our works which save us. That is just a small piece, a tiny sliver of the rest we will one day receive. John saw a sliver of the eternal rest in his revelation. He said **Revelation 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"**

There is only one place to rest here in this earth. Our resting place is Jesus Christ. He gives us rest from the world. He gives us rest from the burden of our sins. And because he worked your salvation out on the cross, you will receive the eternal rest with Him forever in paradise. All thanks and praise be to Jesus Christ our Savior, who secured our salvation and has given us eternal and everlasting rest. Amen.