

Rev. Dan Welch "Time to Get Some Rest!" Hebrews 4:1-13 10-20-24

Two weeks. Two more weeks until we "fall back". Yes, with the end of this year's edition of Daylight Savings Time, our clocks will once again turn back one hour. That means we'll get to enjoy an extra hour of refreshing rest before we gather for worship on Sunday, November 3rd. And with the days already getting so much *shorter* this time of year, it will be so much easier to go to bed earlier at night.

Rest is good. Rest is essential. I've learned that the hard way this month. What started out as a slight cough on October 1st, turned into sinus congestion, and then chest congestion that managed to hang on and not let go of me for almost three full weeks. Last Sunday, I talked with a member who got over her cold in less than a week, because she made it a point to get extra rest. And I realized that that was my trouble. Getting extra rest is not only a refreshing thing, but also *essential*; especially for getting over a cold. Skipping that extra rest had its consequences for me.

Today's text from Hebrews chapter 4 also teaches us about the importance of rest; the kind of rest that you get right here in church. And no, it does not mean you get to close your eyes and take a nap for the next ten minutes! Please don't do that. (😊) The rest *God* desires to give us, is rest for our souls, which is even more important, in fact, far more important, than rest for our bodies.

One of the great comforting passages that I often share when visiting with someone who is struggling with ill health or recovering from a surgery is from Matthew 11 starting with verse 28: "28 Come to me, all 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."

Up until a few short years ago, I used to be able to get by just fine without ever taking naps, but I have come to learn that some things change over time. What does *not* change is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who spoke these comforting words, Who knows our every weakness, and even *better* still knows exactly what we need. We need rest! Rest in Him. And the long-term consequences of skipping out on this kind of God-given rest are devastating and deadly. Much worse than not resting up when you have a cold. So, as the sermon title says it today: It's 'time to get some rest.' Let's dig in!

Today's reading from Hebrews 4 urges all Christians to believe God's promise of rest and to hold on to that promise by being faithful. This reading is the second part of a passage that exhorts Christians to persevere in faith and faithfulness. We heard the first part of this passage last Sunday from Hebrews

chapter **three**. In case, you couldn't be here, I'll give a quick refresher: There the writer to the Hebrew Christians reminds them of the sinful stubbornness and unbelief that led most of the Exodus Israelites to die in the wilderness and not enter into the rest of God's Promised Land. We heard how "today is the day" to encourage one another to remain faithful to Jesus. What day is it? It's today! And as long as it's today we are to remain faithful to our Savior and to give encouragement to our fellow believers.

Those words from Hebrews 3 are a quote and a call back to Psalm 95 (Ps 95:7-11b) exhorting God's people to hear and believe God's voice **today** (He 3:7) and not to respond to the LORD with unbelief and unfaithfulness like the Israelites did in the wilderness. Because it was the hardness of their hearts that provoked God to promise: "They will certainly not enter **my rest**" (3:11). And indeed, they did not enter God's rest **because of their unbelief** (3:18).

Now, let's jump forward to today's text. In Hebrews 4:1, Christians are warned: "Therefore, while the promise of entering (God's) rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." The author of the book of Hebrews knew that these New Testament Hebrew Christians have been given God's Gospel promises just as the Old Testament Israelites had been. But sadly, that word did not help the Israelites, because they did not combine faith with hearing (4:2; see also 4:6). Sure, they **heard** God's Word, but they didn't **hold** to it. They didn't believe it. Instead, they closed off their hearts from trusting God who had always been faithful to them. Now, the Christians, from the time of the New Testament and today, are urged not to fall into that same error of unfaithfulness and unbelief and thereby fail to enter God's rest. We don't want to miss out on God's rest.

But what exactly is the rest that remained a promise even for Christians living long after the Israelite's wanderings in the desert? It's not the entrance into the promised land of Canaan. After all, it says in verse 8 of Hebrews 4: "For if Joshua had given (the Israelites) rest, (then) God would not have spoken of **another** (rest) later on" (4:8). So, what is the rest promised for us Christians from all times and places? It's God's own rest on the seventh day. As it says in verse 4: "For (the Lord) has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works (4:4, quoting Gn 2:2). So, the author to the Hebrews concludes: "So then, there remains a **Sabbath rest** for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter **that** rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience" (4:9-11).

From these verses, we see that the promised rest is *ultimate* and *eternal*. It's not temporary. This promise is a promise of life with God and all His people in the new creation. There we will enjoy the eternal life of the age to come.

So, what work must we do to enter into God's sabbath rest? In one sense, nothing: "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:8-10). Being able to enter into God's Sabbath rest is 100% a gift from God. Because of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection, all our sins are forgiven us and God has given us the gift of eternal life. We do nothing to earn it.

These verses from Ephesians chapter 2 couldn't be clearer: We are not saved by doing good works, but we are saved in order to *do* good works. What kind of good works? Works like *remaining faithful to God* and loving people. In regard to today's text from Hebrews good works mean that **we strive to enter** God's Sabbath rest *through faith in God's promise and in faithfulness to the God who made it*. Make no mistake, God calls us to be faithfully obedient. We don't want to become like the Israelites in the wilderness who failed to enter the rest of the promised land because they neither believed the promise given to them nor obeyed the God who made it. The good news of Christ's Gospel is that God freely calls us to faith and helps us to remain faithful as we gather right here every Sunday, on this "Day of Rest and Gladness".

I love how the hymnwriter, Christopher Wordsworth, describes that for us in stanza three of the hymn we just sang before the sermon:

This day, God's people meeting,
His Holy Scripture hear;
His living presence greeting,
Through bread and wine made near.
We journey on, believing,
Renewed with heav'nly might,
From grace more grace receiving,
On this blest day of light.

This stanza of the hymn explores the Third Commandment, which I talked about with the children here today. It emphasizes the importance of our sabbath rest and our worship life together. Through God's Means of Grace- "We journey on, believing, Renewed with heaven'nly might, From grace more grace receiving." (lines 5-7). In other words, God strengthens us right here through

this sabbath rest, as we journey onwards in life towards our *ultimate* Sabbath rest with Him in heaven.

Remember how God has made His promise of eternal sabbath rest for you in His means of grace. Through your baptism into God's family, He first made you His beloved child. And nothing, other than your own choosing to fall away from faith in Him, can ever take that away from you.

And now through your faithful hearing of God's Word in the Divine Service which delivers to You His forgiveness and love, God is strengthening you as you journey on your way to your eternal Sabbath rest. Here, too you and I are given a foretaste of the eternal feast to come in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of our sins. Again, these are the ways God continues to deliver His promise of rest to you and actually **gives** you rest now.

Rest is good. Rest is essential. Make sure you keep resting in God's presence here in the Divine Service. As you continue to trust in Him, you will have His blessed assurance that one day you will come to the Ultimate Sabbath Rest in the in the indescribable joy and beauty of God's presence in heaven forever! Amen