

## A Pentecost 7

29 June 2008

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## “A Sabbath Rest”

Hebrews 4.9-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

The text for this sermon is Hebrews 4.9-11: <sup>9</sup>So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; <sup>10</sup>for those who enter God’s rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. <sup>11</sup>Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest.

R & R: rest and relaxation – for me, the phrase itself is soothing. Life can get hectic – who was it (Pogo?) that said “the hurrier I go, the behinder I get”? We need R & R – times of refreshing and rejuvenation.

"Rest" was important to the OT people. Think about how exhausting it must have been to be part of the Exodus. A nation of slaves heading out into a desert wilderness. Their energy must have gone completely into the business of survival: getting up in the morning to gather the manna that God provided, packing up all of their possessions, setting out on the day's journey, carrying everything they owned, looking for water, digging wells, setting up a new camp. Laying down exhausted and facing the prospect of getting up and doing it all again the next day.

And so at Sinai, where God makes a covenant with this nation of slaves, God provided rest. A day of rest. A day to set aside the anxieties of the journey and relax. A day to focus on family and on their relationship with God. A day of rest ... a Sabbath.

“The hurrier I go, the behinder I get!” The daily grind. Even if you are blessed to love your work, doing it day after day after day, and adding in household chores, shopping and cooking and cleaning, and – for some – adding family responsibilities – it can all be exhausting.

There are families that have to deal with pressures on top of that. Chronic illness, aging parents, a spouse descending into dementia, financial woes. All of that can be physically exhausting. We need rest.

Beyond all of that are the bigger issues that can weary not just the body but the spirit as well. Issues of finding purpose and meaning in life. Wrestling with our mortality, coming to grips with the fact that we will one day pass on and will stand before God to give an account.

St. Paul wrote quite a bit about his struggle to find peace with God. In Philippians 3 he writes about that time in his life when he believe he could – he *had* to – earn God’s favor. “No one,” he says, “no one did as much to earn God’s favor as I did: Impeccable credentials as one of God’s chosen people. A Pharisee. And so zealous that I was out there persecuting Christians. I was going to protect God by arresting Christians.”

“And yet,” Paul says, “with all of that I did not have peace with God. My spirit was still troubled.” No matter how much Paul did to earn God’s favor, it did not bring peace to St. Paul’s spirit. Quite the opposite. Trying to earn God’s favor became a treadmill of anxiety.

That's what Paul is writing about in today's 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson (Romans 7): I know what I *need* to do. I know what I *shouldn't* be doing. I *want* to do the right thing. I *want* to do the things I need to do to be right with God. And, like a moth that is drawn to the deadly flame, I go back again and again and again to the very things I should not do. I believe I should earn God's favor and I go back to the very things that I know displease God.

"Wretched man that I am!" – he's not at peace – "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Some of you have been Lutherans long enough to remember the 1940 hymnal. Good old "page 5 & 15." In that liturgy the confession of sins began with the words "I a poor, miserable sinner confess all my sins & iniquities with which I have ever offended you..." I a poor, miserable sinner.

25, 30 years into using that hymnal people started objecting to calling themselves "miserable". Why that's saying that I'm wretched, pathetic.

Well, it really wasn't that bad a word. What it was saying was when I take an honest look at my situation, when I realize I not only can't earn God's favor but I'm so often doing the things that displease God – I feel lousy. It makes me feel miserable.

"Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Our text reminds us: There is still a sabbath rest for the people of God. There is still a Sabbath, still an opportunity for us to lay down our burdens.

Our Sabbath is not Saturday. Our Sabbath is not Sunday! It's not a day at all! Our Sabbath is Jesus.

Hear again his gracious invitation in our Gospel story: Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will *be* your rest.

Jesus is our Sabbath. Jesus is our rest. Jesus gives us rest from "sin, death, and the power of Satan", as Luther taught us to say.

Jesus gives us rest from all our fears about the future. Oil may go up to \$200 a barrel, and gas may be \$10 a gallon. The economy could collapse, leaving all my investments and pension plans worthless. We will still have a Good Shepherd watching over us, caring for us, providing for all our needs.

My health may go bad. I could reach the point where the doctors say "there is nothing more we can do". I will still be living my life in the hands of a great Physician who has conquered Death.

I may, like Paul, struggle with sin, find myself going back to the very things I know I should not do and are killing me, but I know that in Jesus I have peace with God. I have rest from the unrelenting struggle to *earn* God's favor. Jesus has taught me that God loves me ... "just as I am" as we sometimes sing. Baptized into Jesus, God claims me as His child, now and forever.

All the OT people got was a Sabbath day – 24 hours of rest. And it's important for us to have a rhythm of rest in our lives. Saturday is still my Sabbath Day, my day of rest away from the routines of work.

But we NT people have a bigger, better Sabbath. Not a Sabbath day, but a Sabbath rest from sin, death, and the power of Satan that is 24/7, 365 days a year. Jesus invites us to lay cares and anxieties and burdens on Him and just bask in the love of God.

At Sinai God told the OT people to remember, honor the Sabbath Day. Keep that day of rest in rhythm of your lives.

I would urge you NT people to remember your Sabbath. I don't mean "don't cut the grass on Sunday, but to remember, to remind yourself day in and day out of the rest you have in Jesus Christ: rest from the damning power of sin, rest from the finality of death, rest from the power of forces of evil, rest from the need to justify ourselves before God, rest from the exhausting drive to pile up more and more stuff as a measure of our worth.

Remember: Wear a cross, make the sign of a cross. Be in the Word, in prayer, worship. Have daily devotions, family devotions. Sing hymns, listen to Christian music. Surround yourself with Christian art and symbols.

Just remember.

Remember that Jesus is our sabbath ... our rest.