

October 21, 2018

God's Rest for You

Text: Hebrews 4:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Third Commandment reads as follows, **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it Holy”**. (SC p. 12). This should come as no surprise because most of us have heard this Command from God since childhood. We’ve heard it preached from the pulpit, read it in God’s Word, and learned more about it during Confirmation and Bible classes. As such, we are also familiar with Martin Luther’s explanation of this Commandment also, **“What does this mean? (Luther asks) We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” (SC p. 12).**

In thinking about the Third Commandment, I have found that there is a theme that runs through it that isn’t talked about that much and that theme is the theme of rest. That’s it. Rest. To chill, relax, to cast our burdens on the Lord, to take a break from our labors. Resting means we slow down and stop. And resting is probably one of the hardest things for us as humans to do, particularly when we are younger.

But here’s the thing. When we consider the Third Commandment and the theme of rest, we are drawn, as we should be, to His Word where our Lord says, **“...The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28)**. Did you catch that, the Sabbath, the day of rest from our labors and for our weary souls was made for us, not us for the Sabbath. God knew in His divine wisdom and great love for us that humanity would become what it has today. He knew that we’d eventually have so many things on our plate every day that the last thing we’d ever consider is resting. What does that busyness look like?

If you’re an adult, you usually work outside the home for 40 hours a week or more. Stay at home moms work non-stop 7 days a week. Then there are those extra-post work type things we are involved in as well: play dates, camping trips, sporting practices, games, and tournaments, 4-H, FFA, and meetings at church. I’ve even heard stories from those of you who farm about the long hours you put in working on farm equipment so that it is ready to go the next day.

And let us not forget about the rest our children need. Children are tired too. With school homework, sports, dance, band, drama club, and part time jobs when are they to rest? I know, how about we rest when we retire, sound good to you? Well, even in retirement rest alludes us. Many times our parents and grandparents find themselves keeping busy by taking care of us adult children, their grandchildren and great grandchildren and enjoying their hobbies, hopefully. Then finally, when rest does seem to come, it's hard to put down our cell phones and turn off our brains so that we can get a good nights' sleep. But in all the hustle, bustle, and busyness of our lives, there is indeed rest available.

You get it. You understand what I am saying. You need more rest. But where am I going with this and what does it have to do with our readings today? Let's take a look at our Epistle reading to find out. In our Epistle text today we find that the children of Israel weren't much different from us today. How? Because they forgot what it meant to rest. Listen to the Word of the Lord again, **"For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened...as God...swore, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"** (Hebrews 4:2-3). What is going on here is that God is mad because they've forgotten how He has brought them out of the land of Egypt, how he miraculously led them across the parted Sea of Reeds on dry ground. These Israelites had forgotten that God appeared to them on Mount Sinai. Because they had forgotten Him, they had rejected Him. As such, God said that no one over the age of twenty would enter the land He had promised them, the land flowing with milk and honey. Instead, they would find no physical rest for their weary bodies as they wandered in circles in the wilderness for forty years. They found no rest because they rejected God, physically and spiritually. They turned their noses up to God's provisions for them. They cursed God with greedy hearts, wanting what they had in Egypt rather than the sweet and gracious gifts He gave to them daily.

Friends, are we any different? Here we are, on our Sabbath day, resting in this place, remembering, as the Third Commandment says, "the Sabbath day by keeping it holy" and yet we are not at rest. Yes, physically perhaps we are for an hour or two, but what about our souls, our hearts? Are they at rest? Can we be at rest in the Lord spiritually, truly keeping the Third Commandment if we are not at rest, at peace with one another? The answer, and we all know it, is no, we can't. We can never enter our Lord's rests; we can never keep the Sabbath day holy because we are sinners. Because of our sinful nature, that original sin that we are born with, we are indeed like the children of Israel in our Epistle text this morning. It's difficult to rest in the Lord when we've forgotten what

who He is, what He commands of us, and what He has done for us on the cross, to give us rest. Because of sin, our hearts carry the weight of the world as we are unable to truly forgive and love our neighbors as Jesus does for us. And unless something is done about it, we will go to our graves restless, never being able to enter the Promised Land of Heaven, because we would have rejected God in every way.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, there is indeed something that has been done for us that we can hold onto to, that we can stand firm on, something that has been done to give us rest. That something, is there, at the cross. On the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ bled for us, giving up His life, so that we can be free from the bondage of sin, so that we can be saved, so that our souls can have rest in Him and with our neighbors. It is rest that our Lord gives us today. It is His rest here, in this Holy House, on this Holy Ground, that our Lord says to us from the cross, **"Come to me, all who labor (physically and spiritually) and are heavy laden (whose hearts are heavy because of sin), and I will give you rest. I will give you rest so that you make remember who I am, how I have delivered you, and how much I love you."**

Fellow Christians, today, our Lord gives us rest for our weary bodies and soul. His Word promises it. There at the altar, our Lord declares that not only will He give us His rest, but that He will feed us so that your souls can rest in Him alone, as we receive again His grace, mercy, and forgiveness in His body and blood, broken and shed for us for the forgiveness of all our sins. And in doing so, that we can go and love our friends and enemies, forgiving them of their trespasses as we are forgiven ours.

The Sabbath day was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. It is indeed a Holy day, given for our rest physically and spiritually. May we always live in the love of Christ who makes us holy through His death on the cross for us as we remember the Sabbath. Now, and forever. Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.