

Jesus is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Easter  
April 18, 2010  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church  
Hecla, SD

Text: Hebrews 4:1-11 *Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we how have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,'" although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest." Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterwards have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.*

Theme: Rest for the People of God

- What is "God's rest?"
- Who are "God's people?"
- Why do we need to be "diligent to enter" it?

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus who are yet basking in the Easter S-o-n rise!

How important is it for you to get plenty of rest? It's interesting the cycle that our bodies go through, isn't it? When were born, sleep was what consumed the majority of our time. When we became toddlers, one or two naps were necessary to make it through the day. As we got older, though naps were something we fought off. But as we entered our late teen-age years and adulthood those naps became something we longed for. We wanted more rest but it seemed like we didn't have enough time to rest. There was too much work to get done. But as we age and enter retirement age, our bodies once again need more rest just to function. Until at last, in old age - just like infancy - it seems a majority of our time is spent resting.

Rest is very important for our bodies and minds to function properly. Our Creator knew how important it was and that is why He set apart Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as a Sabbath day for His Old Testament people. As Jesus told some disgruntle Pharisees, "***The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.***" (Mk 2:27) But Sabbath Saturday was not only intended to give much needed rest to body, but it was to be for man a picture of a great coming rest.

It is that rest which we want to consider this morning. Let us focus on the words found in verse 9 of our text, "***There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.***" What exactly is that rest that the writer refers to, who are the people of God that are promised this rest, and why does

the holy writer urge us to be diligent to enter that rest? May God the Holy Spirit work mightily in us that this hearing of His Word might be mixed with faith.

### WHAT IS "GOD'S REST?"

It's hard to imagine what life was like before the fall into sin. We know from Genesis that the work which God gave Adam and Eve to do, was to tend the Garden of Eden. They were gardeners. And in the Garden there were no weeds to pull or misquotes to swat. There was no equipment that broke down. The tomatoes never had blight. The apples never had worms boring through them. The trees never had aphids. Work was an blessedly enjoyable experience where everything went right.

However, all that changed once sin entered the world. Once sin entered the world, work became work. After the fall into sin God said to Adam, "***Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread Till you return to the ground, For out of it you were taken; For dust you are, And to dust you shall return.***" (Gen 3:17-19) Since the fall into sin, life has been full of burdens. Sure we may enjoy gardening and farming, but it does not come without it's share of hardship. In the sweat of our face we eat our bread. And that is true of any occupation. Life in general became hard work because of sin.

Yet in our text, the writer to the Hebrews repeatedly speaks of the promise of rest. Rest which God possess and God promises to give. God calls it, "***My rest.***" This rest was first seen on the seventh day of Creation. We read in verse 4 of our text, "***For He has spoken in a certain place of the seven day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.'***" Now God did not rest on the seventh day because He was tired from all that creating. The Almighty does not get tired. God was hallowing that day and giving us a picture of the rest that He had prepared for His people in heaven.

The writer helps us understand this rest little better in verse 10 when he writes, "***For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.***" God rested from His work of creating, and has promised eternal rest to His people. Heaven is rest from the toils and struggles of this sinful world. It is a rest from the endless battles in our homes and in our nations. There will be neither thorn nor thistle, neither death nor sorrow, only rest from the labors of this life and the bliss of being with God forever. Just as God rested when His work of creation was done, so God promises rest to His people eternally in heaven.

### WHO ARE THE "GOD'S PEOPLE?"

It seems like each new day brings with it new problems, doesn't it. We have problems at school. We have problems at work. We have problems with our machinery. We have problems with our bodies. That volcano in Iceland reminds us that we even have problems with our planet. We long for a day when all these problems will come to an end! We long for that rest which God speaks of. But if we are going to be partakers of that rest, we first need to find out who are "the people of God?"

When we first hear God speaking of "My people" in the Old Testament it is of the Children of Israel as they are being held slaves in Egypt. Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh, "***Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness.'***" (Ex 5:1) How blessed that was to have the one true God refer to you as "My

people.” After God gave those terrible plagues in Egypt and freed the Children of Israel from slavery, God made a covenant, two-sided agreement, between Himself and them. He told them that if they would be faithful to Him and obey His commandments, then He would be their God and they would be His people. He would give them rest from their enemies and the promised land of Canaan.

Just as the Sabbath rest was a picture of a greater, eternal rest to come, so was this relationship between God and the Children of Israel. When God brought you to faith in Jesus, when you were baptized in His Triune name, God made you His people - the New Testament Children of Israel. Paul writes to the Galatians, **“Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.”** (Gal 3:7) Peter also writes of the believer, ***you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people.*** And again, **“Who once were not a people but are now the people of God.”** (1 Pt 2:9, 10)

Through faith in His Son, you are the people of God. God now says of you, that you are “My people.” He gives you rest from all your enemies - the enemy of sin, the enemy of death, and the enemy of the devil. Jesus defeated them all and God gives you rest from them. Even as God promised His Old Testament people the promised land of rest in Canaan, God has promised you eternal rest through Jesus in the Canaan of heaven. There is a rest that awaits you, through faith in Jesus!

#### WHY DO WE NEED TO BE DILIGENT TO ENTER IT?

Just as the Children of Israel are an example of God being with His people and bringing them to the Promised Land, the Children of Israel wandering in the wilderness serves as a warning to us. Do you remember why it was that it took the Children of Israel 40 years to make it from Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan? It was because of their disobedience. That first generation to be freed from slavery complained against God and Moses and said they wanted to go back to their old way of life in Egypt, where they said they were better off. And when God was giving Moses the Ten Commandments what were the Children of Israel doing at the bottom of Mount Sinai? They made a golden calf and were worshiping it saying that a golden calf, not God, had delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

It was because of their disobedience that we hear God saying in verse 3, **“So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”** Just as blessed as it is to be called the “people of God” it would be equally horrific to have God say this! They wandered in the wilderness for forty years so that none of those who rebelled at Sinai would be alive to enter the Canaan, except for Joshua and Caleb.

But there was a greater Promised Land that they were barred from, the eternal rest of heaven. This is because they were disobedient to the Gospel. They hardened their hearts to the Word and rejected it. It wasn't for lack of hearing the Gospel. They heard the Gospel just as we do. The writer says in verse 2, **“For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”** They heard the word. They heard God's promise of rest in the gospel. But it was not mixed with faith. They rejected what God gives freely in the gospel. Therefore God swore in His wrath that those disobedient unbelievers would not enter His rest.

What is there for us to learn from this? VERY MUCH! We note that the Children of Israel were God's people rescued from physical slavery. We are God's people whom He has rescued from spiritual slavery to sin and death. We note that the Children of Israel heard the

Gospel and heard the promise of rest. We have heard the Gospel and God's promise of eternal rest. God swore in His wrath that those disobedient, unbelievers would not enter His rest. What of us?

It is for this reason that the writer to the Hebrews says in verse 1, ***“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.”*** And then he emphasizes it again in verse 11, ***“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.”*** The lesson of the Children of Israel ought to be a warning to each of us not to neglect the need of our soul. There is a part of each one of us that would like to follow the sinful world. There is a part in each of us that thinks serving sin is better than serving God. There is a part of each one of us that wants to give someone or something all the glory instead of God - maybe we even want to give ourselves the glory.

Therefore we need to be diligent to enter that rest, lest we follow in the footsteps of disobedient and unbelieving in Israel - who heard the Gospel but it was not mixed with faith. This matter of being diligent to enter God's rest needs to be vitally important to each believer. Make no mistake about it, we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Jesus died and removed all of our sins. God brought us to faith in Jesus Christ. None of that is our doing. Our salvation is of God's grace from beginning to end. There is nothing we need to do or can do to add to Jesus redemptive work.

However, having been brought to faith there is much we can do to help or harm our faith. The Holy Spirit is almighty, but He has told us that He works through the Gospel both in Word and in Sacrament. If we stay away from church and the Word, it harms our faith. Jesus instituted Lord's Supper for the special comfort and strengthening of our faith. When we do not take advantage of celebrating Lord's Supper, it harms our faith. Being diligent to enter that rest means that we will be diligent in coming to hear God's Word at Church. Diligent to make use of the blessing of Lord's Supper. Diligent to hear and learn His Word in Bible Classes. Diligent to read His Word with home devotions. Diligent to encourage our fellow Christians in their walk of faith lest any of us seem to have come short. The disobedient Children of Israel show us why it is so important that we be diligent to enter that rest.

Ah, rest. We long for it at the end of a hard day. How much more do we long for it eternally at the end of our lives! It is the blessed, eternal Sabbath rest of God which He has secured through Jesus death and resurrection. This the green pasture and still water which our Good Shepherd is leading us to. Let us, therefore be diligent to hear and follow the voice of our Good Shepherd until that great day when we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever! Hallelujah! Amen!