

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. ² For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. ³ Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

*“So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ”*

And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. ⁴ For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.” ⁵ And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

⁶ It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. ⁷ Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

*“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”*

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. ⁹ There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:1-11)

God Gives Us Rest

Almost every year, I ask the kids in my catechism class if summer vacation means that they’re going to sleep until noon every day and do nothing until school starts again. And of course, most of the kids say yes. And it’s total fiction. Not one of them is going to sleep til noon all summer long. You parents just won’t let it happen. And the truth is, it would get old for them to sit around and do nothing all summer long. But every year I have trouble convincing them that that’s true. It sounds so good to rest all summer long. For most of us, summer vacation conjures up the image of sitting on a beach or lying in a hammock or just whiling away the lazy days of summer. Why is that true? Because our lives are so hectic. Many of us have to get up early and we still go to bed late. Many of us work long hours and then we come home and make dinner or do laundry or mow the lawn. Many of us spend most of our weekends taking care of jobs around the house and catching up on things we didn’t get to during the week. Rest sounds so good to us. God knows that. So again and again in the Bible he pictures his greatest gift to us in terms of rest. We see that in our reading for today. The book of Hebrews reminds us: **God gives us rest.**

I.

But what does that rest consist of? This past week, I got back from my summer vacation. This year, we did something a little different: we came back a day early so that my wife wouldn’t have to roll in at midnight and then be at work bright and early the next morning. We gave her a whole day to recover from her vacation. Our trip was not particularly restful. We probably put three thousand miles on the car. We hiked and rafted and walked miles. We set up and tore down our tent a couple of times and repacked the car more times than I care to remember. We were dog tired at one in the morning on the night we got home. But we were glad we went because the vacation was refreshing even it wasn’t restful. We got to get away from routine and TV screens and computers. We got to do things we hadn’t done before and go places we hadn’t seen before. Sometimes, when God talks about rest, he has that same idea of refreshing in mind. It works a little different with him, but the truth remains: **God gives us rest. Be refreshed in that rest.**

God has been talking about rest since he created the world. On the seventh day of this world’s existence, God rested from his labors. Now he wasn’t tired. He was God. But he was creating a rest that he then held out to all people for all time since then. Our goal in life is to enter God’s rest. That’s what this whole

chapter from the book of Hebrews is talking about. Thousands of years later, God gave the children of Israel rest. They were slaves in Egypt and he brought them out with a mighty hand and dramatic miracles. After forty years of wandering and testing and disciplining in the wilderness, God gave them the land of Israel. The Bible says that he gave them rest from all their enemies. They had a home. They could feel safe and work and raise their families.

But that physical rest was not the true rest that he created on that seventh day of creation. God always had another, greater rest in mind, a rest that he held out to the people of Israel all through the Old Testament period, a rest that he still holds out to you and me today. God says, **“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.”** But what is that rest? It’s not respite from our enemies, even though God does give that to us sometimes, like he did for Israel. It’s not being refreshed or a change in routine or the physical renewal that comes from catching up on your sleep. We enjoy all those things; they’re good for us. But at best, they’re just a hint of our real rest: heaven. That’s the Sabbath rest for the people of God. At the end of all the toils and labors of life, we get to lay our burdens down and live with Jesus. We reach the end of pain and sorrow, the end of sickness and family problems, of money troubles and relationship issues, of disappointments and frustrations and hurts and sorrows. We will have rest in Christ forever.

We need that rest because this life is full of hurts and sorrows. You know, if you let the entertainment industry define what life is supposed to be like, you’re going to be disappointed. The message of our day is that money or popularity or success in your job will make you happy. You’ll have a smile on your face and a song in your heart and you will be fulfilled. But God never promised that. Can one person here today who has lived longer than the kids from our VBS say that life is really like that? Life hurts, plain and simple. And the only question is how much is it going to hurt and where? Why is life like that?

Because of sin. When God created the world, it was supposed to be a paradise. There wasn’t supposed to be any pain or sorrow or loss. There wasn’t supposed to be any death. But Adam and Eve sinned. They brought into this world an endless river of sorrow and hurt and death. You and I have to live with the hurts that their sins and that other people’s sins inflict on us. But the greatest hurts of our lives come from our own sin. Each one of us is a sinner. God commands us to love him above all else and to love each other as much as we love ourselves. And if we truly lived like that our lives would be much happier, even in this sinful world.

But we don’t live that way. I don’t live that way. I am a sinner and I put myself ahead of God and ahead of my wife and children and ahead of my congregation every single day. That causes me endless pain and frustration here. But you know what? Even when I get away with it here and I don’t suffer the consequences I deserve, my sin still earns me death and hell. I’m growing older and I will die because I am a sinner. Whether you want to admit it or not, the same is true for you. Every day, in more ways than you can possibly name or remember, you sin. You love yourself more than you love God. You love yourself more than you love the people around you. You deserve to die and spend eternity in hell.

That is the greatest sorrow and burden of life. But in Christ, we get to lay it down. Jesus was the Son of God. He came into this world and lived in our place. He was perfect in love for God and for man for you and me and for every human being who will ever live. And then Jesus paid for our sin. On the cross, he suffered the hell and the death that we deserve. God poured out on him all the punishment of all the people who will ever live. That includes you and me. Now, we are forgiven. God raised Jesus from the dead to tell us that our sins are gone and we will live. So when we die, we don’t go to hell, we go to heaven. He is coming back to make this world perfect again and to raise us from the dead to live with him in that perfect world forever. Every time he tells us that, he lifts the guilt off our hearts and takes away the burden.

Knowing Jesus refreshes us. It doesn’t always mean that the hurts and the sorrow go away. Sometimes we have to wrestle with hurts and losses. But in Christ, God refreshes us. We are going to heaven. None of what we see or suffer here will last. We will be with him for all eternity. And he built his power into that promise, power to renew our hearts, power to change our lives, power to strengthen us and carry us through even the worst things that we can suffer here.

II.

Who wouldn’t want that? But all the blessings of this life are based on the promise of the life to come. So God concludes this section by saying, **“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”** God gives us rest. Make every effort to enter that rest.

What could possibly keep us from heaven? Unbelief – and only unbelief. God gave the children of Israel promise after promise. But he said, **“the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.”** If you don’t trust what Christ has done for you, you will not have eternal life. Now, hopefully, we’re all believers here. And if you’re not sure, see me after church and I’ll do my best to help you understand. But even if you do believe, the threat of unbelief shows up in lots of different ways. One way is for us to fail to trust in God’s care for us here. Sometimes even people who believe in Jesus, don’t trust him to take care of them. The danger is that the unbelief in God’s promise to care for me here will contaminate my trust in him to forgive my sins and take me home. The more we get in the habit of trusting in ourselves or in our doctors or in our retirement plans, the closer we come to strangling our faith in Christ.

Another way that unbelief tries to take over our hearts is through temptation. We all have sinful desires. We all want to indulge our lusts or our greed or our desire to be popular. And when we allow sin and temptation to win, we weaken our faith. When we embrace our sinful desires, we murder our faith. The devil sends temptation every day because he wants our faith to die. Finally, we can just be indifferent. We’ve heard about Jesus. We know we believe. We don’t need to go to church and hear it all again. My friends, how long can you live physically without eating and drinking? Your faith needs to eat and drink, too. If you starve it to death, you will slowly drift away from Christ and his word and you will lose God’s rest.

Make every effort to enter that rest. What does that mean? First of all, it means to feed our faith. We need to hear about Jesus over and over again, for as long as we live. We need to come to church. And there’s a special kind of hearing about Jesus that’s in focus here this morning. We need Christian Education. What does that mean? It means teaching the word. This past week, we had our VBS for this year. 75 kids came. We had a week of singing and art projects and above all else, hearing about Jesus. The kids sang this morning to remind us of what they learned. That’s Christian Education. So is Sunday School, which will start right after Labor Day. That includes opportunities for adults to study God’s word. You need it, too!

This morning, we’re going to install a teacher for our Lutheran high school and a teacher for our Lutheran elementary school here at Peace. Those two people are part of a large number of men and women who have dedicated their lives to teaching our children about Christ. You can send your kids to hear about Jesus from age three through eighteen. And while we do all the other things that preschools, elementary schools and high schools do, and we try to do them well, above all else, every day we show Jesus to your children.

Make every effort to enter that rest. Make every effort to enable your children to enter God’s rest. Take advantage of these programs. Recognize that they exist to help us in our day to day fight against temptation. In our schools, we teach our children to flee from temptation and to resist the devil. We teach our children to know that Christ has forgiven them when they fail and to strive as forgiven children of God to turn from their sin. We teach our children to live a life of pursuing Christ, to live every day with the knowledge that this life is temporary, and that the life to come is forever. We teach them to look to heaven and to be refreshed every day as they travel from here and there.

We are all traveling to heaven. Most of us are going to spend decades here before we reach our rest. But heaven is the goal. When we get there, we do get to lay all our burdens down. What makes your life hard? What challenges do you wrestle with? What keeps you up at night? When you reach heaven, you can lay all that down and rest in Christ forever. Between here and there, Jesus comes to you in that promise and gives you the strength to carry on until you get there. Come to be refreshed by that promise often. Make every effort to enter his rest. Amen.