

Sunday, October 21, 2018 – Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost
“What’s Rest?”

Hebrews 4: 1-13

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Definition Structure

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

A couple of weeks ago in junior high Confirmation we were on the topic about what it'll be like when Jesus asks again and someone bravely said something I've heard many adults ask and a question I've wrestled with myself in the past – “What are we going to do? Forever is a really long time. Won't we get bored?”

And if you hear the writer to the Hebrews mention “entering rest” over and over again, that latent fear might be popping back up for you – there's only so much harp music and sitting around you can do before you're mind-numbingly bored, isn't there? If even I, a guy who likes to relax can relate to this feeling then I know those of you who can't sit still or you start going stir-crazy are really sweating it.

Issues with what it means to “rest” start a lot earlier than Jesus' Second Coming though. It's part of our real life, right now struggle. When we talk about creation we talk about everything God did but often forget what ended it all – God rested. I mean, wouldn't you? Have you ever worked your tail off for 70 hours, and you get to the end of the week and you're too tired to even go do something fun? Forget that barbeque, just order a pizza instead. No, forget dinner, just go to sleep. Except, remember, that wasn't the deal with God – He doesn't get “tired” like you and me. What's the deal with God resting?

Well for one thing, we need it. It said it right in our text today: “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.” God's rest is part of the rhythm He establishes for His creation. Like a steady heartbeat, like the rising and setting of the sun, there's a way God designed things to work. For us, that means there's a time for work and there's a time for rest. Work past 55 hours a week and studies show you'll see diminishing returns. Work out too hard too many days in a row and you'll stop making gains even while overtraining increases the odds of injury. Forfeit sleep and you'll end up sleep-deprived, drowsy and dangerous behind the wheel as if you're

impaired by alcohol or drugs. The 7th day He rested, and He set a pattern for us to follow. It's for our well-being, it's for our good. Our bodies were designed to need it.

Second, we are called to enter our rest mindful of why we're resting – God establishes rest to the benefit of our relationship with Him. It's difficult in the middle of our normal daily routines to set aside time for things that are special and different. A weekly day to stop the emails, stop the calls, stop the routine and have God's Word poured into you and His gifts given to you is a refueling – food for a hungry, depleted worker, drink for a thirsty soul. It's a chance to put to bed the challenges, guilt and concerns of the week behind and to be strengthened and rested up to face the week ahead. God's Word, living and active penetrates our body and our soul, laying bare everything about ourselves both to God and to our own consciousness, so we can speak the raw truth about ourselves and receive His grace.

A lot of us prefer to rest by passively taking something in. Don't get me wrong, there's a place for going to the movies, watching a favorite sport, taking in a great meal. The occasional "escape" is healthy – but even more healthy is the rest that gives space for reflection, that connects you in vulnerability with others, that exercises the body, the mind and especially the spirit.

Worship is a place to rest. No, I'm not inviting you to fall asleep while I preach. And note what I didn't say: I didn't say, "If you don't go to church, you're not a Christian," or, "If you've been lacking in your worship life, you better make it up to God to get back in good standing again." See, I think we do with the commandment on rest what too many of us do with all of the commandments – we picture God arbitrarily laying down these fun-busting rules. Then we get resentful, and kind of like a kid who doesn't like the answer we get from our parents about staying up late – "It's bedtime, you need your rest," we'll delay, or we'll pout, or we'll stew on how boring or unfair it all is. Perhaps when we go to church... er, I mean, bed... we go grudgingly.

It's not just little kids – big kids and grownups, too... pull an all-nighter, let your car go unserviced, let yourself go on diet and exercise, irreparable harm usually doesn't happen right away – but neglect that rest and ministry for too long and we're only hurting ourselves. Friends, God invites you here to minister to you so that no one will fall by following an example of

disobedience. The consequences to our faith of evading that vital ministry of God are severe and increase exponentially with our continued and persistent neglect, let a guy who never changes the engine oil – the longer he goes, the more damage done. Being ministered to by God in this way is no small thing – it has implications for our eternal rest and comfort. No one is more loved by God, no one is saved, because they made the decision to go to church every week, but plenty are in danger but avoiding this vital ministry of God!

The point of all this rest talk isn't to burden your conscience with another thing that you "have to do" or are "supposed to do," or else. This is an invitation to bask in God's goodness! Think of it as a day at the spa, or letting Grandma cook for you – you aren't to lift a finger! God's doing all the service. Worship is a place for you to come banged up and bruised, tired and tense, hungry and thirsty, wearied and worried and to let God minister to you. The verb minister actually means "to tend to one's needs." This is the place where God ministers to your needs, for you to rest and take in all the soothing, caring, loving acts of a merciful God who promises here in this space to give rest to your pain, your worries, your guilt, your regrets. This is the rest that Jesus promises to all who are weary and heavily burdened – come to Me, and I will give you rest. This is why Jesus says, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Thanks to God for His Son Jesus whose death carried even that disobedience to the cross! He came to fulfill the Sabbath command to rest perfectly as it was commanded to be kept, and to give its benefits to you and me. He suffered and died for our sins against all the commandments, He rested in the tomb on the Sabbath to completely fulfill it, and He rose from the grave on Easter to make every day holy as one of eternal Sabbath rest for the people of God. Sabbath is more than just worshipping on Sunday – Sabbath rest is a lifestyle. We're invited to rest every day in the peace Jesus won for us and in our lives together as disciples of Jesus.

Jesus is here to minister to your needs – not for compulsion or burdening of your consciences, but to give you rest. Let Him tend to you – no need to be shy or sheepish, or put up a brave front and say you don't need it. And certainly, no need to apologize to me, or all people (as sometimes happens) – I sin against this commandment, too. If you're here for the

first time after a long time away, or listening online and haven't been to church, or you come but it's dragged by your earlobe by a loved one, maybe you feel sheepish to walk back in, and you imagine me or someone else is giving you sideways glance or a shaming look – please know that's not at all how I feel, and it's certainly not what God sees in you. Friend, it's always good to see you here receiving God's gifts. Keep coming back for optimum effect – God's doing stuff to you by His Word and Sacrament! It's why we call this thing we're doing a service – God's service to you everywhere you're banged up and bruised, tired and tense, hungry and thirsty, weary and worried – “come to me you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

Oh, and in case you're wondering, when Jesus comes again, and you do fulfilling, joyful, meaningful and satisfying work in total peace with God and with each other, there won't be time to be bored. What there will be is a permanent break from anxiety, pain, soreness, sadness, grief, regret and burdened consciences – forever. Daily, hourly, minute by minute Sabbath rest. In Jesus, we get a taste of that rest right now. When He comes again, we get that forever. I can't wait to enter that rest.

In Jesus' name, Amen.