

October 21, 2018

Hebrews 4:1-13:

“Entering His Rest”

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Everything that has been made is of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit (Romans 11:36). After creating all things in six days, God rested on the seventh day, known as the Sabbath. Now, this doesn't mean that God took a nap and left the world unattended. Rather, as God has created the world, so he also sustains it and continually cares for all his creatures, particularly mankind. According to the Bible, the ultimate end of the creation is for the glory of God. It is a light that reveals who God is and what his will is for us. "The Lord works out everything to its proper end," it says in Proverbs 16:4b. And the Psalmist writes, "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works...I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live (Psalm 104:31 and 33)." Johannes Andreas Quenstedt (1617-1688) writes: "God made all things for the sake of man[kind], but man[kind] he made for his own sake."

God was satisfied with all that he made, and all that he has made serves as a light to reveal a blessed goal that God has in mind. He rejoices and we rejoice! Now, after making the man and the woman, it says in Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning the sixth day." Genesis 2:2a, tells us something very important about the seventh day: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work." When we put all of this together, and there is more that we could add, there are some powerful thoughts that begin to flow. Pastor Valerius Herberger (a Lutheran pastor who lived from 1562-1627) wrote that:

...God wished to rest in man[kind] as in his own property, residence, and temple, to celebrate his day of joy and peace with man[kind], to fill man[kind]'s heart to the brim with wisdom, righteousness, holiness, light, and life, and evermore find in man[kind] his rest, delight, gladness, and pleasure. Man[kind], for his part, was simply to rest in God, to expect all good things from him, to have his day of delight, joy, and peace in God, to find his enjoyment in God, to receive nothing from God but love and goodness in eternal peace, and to speak of God's works in constant tranquility.

God blessed the Sabbath day as a day of rest. God had labored and now embraced the fruits of his labor as if the man and woman were a crop that he grew and now has harvested, resting in all that the harvest will mean for mankind. As new beings, mankind must also now labor in the labor of God - the results of the six days of creation in order to get to know God and all that he desires for them. This is why it says in Genesis "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'" And he also made a suitable helper for him to participate in all the above so that both man and woman might understand what God desires to have with them on a spiritual level.

They had to work it and take care of it. And rest would come in the day in which they would reach out and eat from the tree of life. They lived in the creation that God had made, and their labor was the

school of God. To this day, though everything has fallen into sin, we labor in the creation. Intricately “woven in the depths of the earth,” as we are according to Psalm 139:5, we labor - we work the creation. For example, we look at a tree or a plant and see how the tree or plant is dependant on the ground to understand how we ourselves are dependant upon God. We interact with the animals that we may come to certain conclusions about how God is over us as we are to the animals. We stare at the expanse above and work out how these things are in order to understand that God is a God of order, infinite, all-powerful while we are finite and derive our order and powers from him who made everything. And on and on it goes. Adam and the woman were to work the creation, and thereby understand God and what his will is for them, and this kind of thing goes on to this day even in the womb - the depths of the earth.

God’s rest then was the beginning of mankind’s labor, that mankind might live in the six days of a school by which he might come to an understanding of God and his heart. Two trees were placed in the garden as a focal point of the lesson to be learned, for the two trees were the heart and center of the proper fear of God by which all new beings were to come to a proper understanding, in order to be eternal companions of God and move from an understanding through creation to a face to face relationship with the creator. The proper fear of God is to understand that apart from him we are nothing and have nothing. In him is love and God is the good from which all good things come. There was supposed to come a time in God’s schoolhouse when Adam and the woman would have reached out to eat from the tree of life. In doing so, they would have removed from themselves the ability to say “no” to God, and would have received then all that God had given and would give forever. This, as we know, did not happen.

Nevertheless, the two trees were Adam and the woman’s church that captured everything about the creation and their relationship with God. The first sermon from God was about the two trees and was an education about God’s labor, rest, and goal for mankind. God intended to rest in our hearts forever, and we in him. But the devil would have none of that as he had fallen against the whole thing. We know what happens next, how he ruined everything by tricking the woman while Adam allowed himself to go against better knowledge. And just as God had promised, death came into the world. Mankind not only dies in his breath, but all are now spiritually dead. This is how restlessness came into the world. But, as Augustine so poignantly states: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”

If it were not for the words spoken to the serpent, we would be lost: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” It is no wonder then as to why Adam named his wife Eve - “the mother of all the living.” She is the mother of all the living, for life is brought back to all of us in the virgin’s son who gave his blood, labored in suffering and death, rested in the grave, and restored to us our lost day of rest. In a fallen world, our labor will not get us to heaven. Instead, Christ must labor by recreating all things, as he says, “My Father is working until now, and I am working (John 5:17).”

And, what a blessed thing it is that God gave the commandment to Moses, “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.” To no other commandment but this one did God attach the word “remember.” God knows full well how careless and forgetful we are and how impossible it is for us to do anything for

our salvation! This remembering takes us to our epistle lesson for this morning where it says, "the promise of entering his rest still stands (Hebrews 4:4)." It also says, "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. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by . . . disobedience (Hebrews 4:9-11)."

The day of rest stands by virtue of Jesus Christ who is our Sabbath Day. Just as Paul writes, "The Sabbath day is a shadow of [what was] to come; the reality...is found in Christ (Col. 2:16-17)." Yes! Jesus is our Sabbath Day of rest. The two trees are still before us. We see the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Law. And there is still the tree of life, only now the tree has been prepared for sinful humanity by the one who became sin for us. On the tree of the cross, Jesus is the fruit that we must eat (as we do in the Sacrament of the Altar) in order to reverse the wrong eating in the garden and find rest. Our Sabbath day is here in Jesus, the holy one who has overturned every unholiness and has brought holy rest for each and everyone of us - eternal life. Again, the words of Pastor Herberger:

Accordingly, just as the Lord Jesus rested here on the seventh day after having completed all his tasks for Friday, so after the rest between God and man had been disturbed by sin, the Lord Jesus rested yet again in the tomb, and by his resting won back that rest that man had before the fall, restoring everything that had been lost by the deceit of the evil one. Just as the Lord Jesus once completed all creation on Friday (Gen. 2:2), so the Lord Jesus completed the work of redemption on Good Friday, saying in truth, "It is finished." Just as Jesus once rested on the eve of Saturday, so after the quiet Friday in the tomb, He rested on Saturday and acquired for us the most blessed rest previously lost by Adam's fall. Here ponder, dear heart, what a great and inexpressible treasure this is.

The Sabbath day is truly here in Jesus' rest. We look forward then to resurrection! This is why we no longer worship on Saturday but on Sunday. As *Luther's Small Catechism* implies, rest is found in the word and sacraments. This is our continuing labor now, for as Paul writes: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17)." And with this blessed labor down here are added these words of John: "Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them (Revelation 14:13).'"

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott