Why did God rest on the seventh day? Was it because He was so exhausted from all that creating that He just needed to take a break and relax for a while? Of course not. God is omnipotent. Creating is easy to God. Even creating the entire universe from nothing was not difficult for Him. So, God did not need to rest for Himself.

**Waiting for the Lord:**

**To Give Rest**

**Genesis 1:1-2:3**

2nd Mid-week Lent

(by Rev. Aric Fenske – revised)

Instead, God rested on the seventh day for us. He was establishing the pattern by which Adam and Eve and their children would learn to find rest. That is what God wanted for man, the pinnacle of His creation. Their whole lives, not just one day a week, but their entire existence was meant to be a life of rest. What else would we call it? Walking side by side with God, basking in His holy presence for all eternity, taking in and enjoying all of the wonder of God’s creation without any thought of trouble - EVER – that sounds like perfect rest, does it not?

Even the work that God had given them to do – tending and caring for the garden – would have provided rest to them. It was not hard or toilsome before they ate ‘that’ fruit, not until after the fall. At first it would have been an absolute pleasure. Just like how some of you find rest by tending your gardens or maybe doing woodworking projects. Everything they would have done in unity with God would have brought them rest.

Unfortunately, they did not remain in communion with God. They destroyed their unity with God because they were not content to be lords over the rest of God’s creation. They wanted to be gods themselves. They became restless. They failed to trust God’s Word, ate the forbidden fruit, and their work became toilsome and dangerous. Their bodies became corruptible and decayed, their consciences were troubled, and their minds filled with worries and doubts. We know this to be true because they immediately made loincloths out of fig leaves sown together – and they hid from God. These are the same things which make us restless.

Ironically, we probably have more free time for leisure than any other people in history. 200 years ago, even 110, your ancestors did not have 40-hour work weeks, with the ability to clock out at 4:30 and go home, grab a beer, plant in the La-Z-boy, flip on the game, and relax for the rest of the night. They did not get weekends off to spend at the lake. In fact, they probably did not have lake homes or campers. They did not have 3 or 4 weeks of vacation each year which allowed them to just choose not to work.

Our lifestyle just did not exist 200 years ago. We have more time for rest and relaxation than our forefathers could possibly imagine. Supposedly, our technology frees up even more time.

And yet we are still restless. Studies claim that despite all our technologies and leisure time, we are, as a whole, far less happy and fulfilled than our ancestors. We are filled with all sorts of anxieties. We worry about everything, from being popular in school, to finding a spouse, or a good job. We worry we might offend with our word selection, to the weather. We stress over precautions for COVID and the skyrocketing price of fuel and food.

At least that is what the research declares. The number of people who are clinically depressed or on medication for depression and anxiety continues to rise year after year – as does the suicide rate.

Despite our abundance of leisure time, most people complain about being too busy! Many families grumble that they do not have any time to sit down and eat dinner together anymore. They are busy running from work, to practices, to games, to meetings, and more.

Retired folks joke about how they are busier now than when they worked. We fill our lives with a million different things – all because we are trying to find peace on our own terms. We believe that by adding all these different things into our schedules, maybe we will find something that makes us happy, and gives us peace

But of course, it doesn't. It only exhausts us, and we burn out. What we need is real rest. We need more than just time to relax and rest our bodies. We need rest for our souls! That is the real problem. Our sinfulness has separated from God. And whether we want to acknowledge it or not, our hearts are troubled.

One of the ancient Church fathers, named Augustine put it beautifully when he said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” If that sounds familiar, it is because it is what Jesus tells in our Gospel. “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls,” (Mat 11:28-29).

How does Jesus give you rest? He takes up your yokes and labors for you. He becomes – for you – the One whose heart is troubled and heavy laden. This is what Isaiah prophesies will take place. On Good Friday we will read that He bears our griefs, and carries our sorrows. Jesus Himself pours out His heart to the Father in the Garden on the night before He dies. He carries your sin all the way to the point of death so that He can give you rest.

Through Christ’s death on the cross, your sins are removed and you are brought back into communion with God. As you know, all of Scripture is about Christ. So also God’s rest on the 7th day. As we said at the beginning, creating ex nihilo – from nothing – did not exhaust God. It did point forward however to the greater work of God.

Carrying the burden of the sins of all mankind, Christ goes to the cross, is forsaken by His Father, and dies to bury all our burdens in His tomb. From this labor of love, He rests in the tomb on the 7th day of the week. With His glorious resurrection, Jesus gives to you the assurance of your own resurrection on the Last Day, and your eternal rest. Every day in Paradise will be a Sabbath rest! As we heard from the Epistle reading, “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,” (Heb 4:9).

However, this rest which Jesus promises is not simply a promise for the future. Jesus offers us this rest here and now. Until Christ brings us to His side in heaven, He comes to us with rest.

He comes with His Word of forgiveness, His Word of Hope in which we find rest.

He condescends to us with His own crucified and risen flesh and blood to feed and strengthen us to rest in Him.

By these means of grace, Jesus not only gives us all that we need to enter that heavenly Sabbath, but He is reconciling us to God here and now that we may have peace with God – true rest.

He gives us all that we need to sustain us until this life ends. Therefore, every day in which we hear God’s Word and hope in His promises, is a day of rest for us.

So, you who are created and beloved by God, whose hearts are troubled with many things, “Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall…”(Heb 4:11).

Continue in this foretaste of the greater Sabbath that remains for God’s people. Find your rest in God today and every day through the forgiveness of your sins. Take your rest in and the assurance of God’s gracious provision. In Christ Jesus you are prepared by God Himself for the eternal sabbath rest which all of Adam’s children have been longing for.

Rest in Christ Jesus now, and for eternity. In Jesus’ name. Amen.