

The 21th Sunday after Pentecost
October 17, 2021

“Eternal rest for the people of God through our High Priest, Jesus”
(Hebrews 4:1-3,14)

By Rev. Ed Weber

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this 21th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading – Hebrews 4:1-3,14.

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 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. 3 For we who have believed do enter that rest... Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”
Here ends our text.

I. There remains a promise of entering His rest
“Go get some rest”, is something a friend might say to another. “You’ve been working hard”. It’s time for a well-deserved rest. “Go, put your feet up and relax.”

We all know how important rest from our labors is. In Major League Baseball, which is in the thick of things right now with the playoffs, the managers especially make it a science to rest their pitchers. Every pitch is counted. And pitchers have to have so many days off to give their arms enough time to heal and be ready for their next start.

Baseball players are often given nicknames. Randall Johnson was a 6’10’ pitcher who threw a fastball over 100 mph. He was called “The Big Unit”, because of his size and stamina. Albert Pujols, the oldest player in baseball at age 41 who is currently with the Dodgers, is called “The Machine”. Like a machine, the right-handed hitter keeps going and going with over 3000 hits. But, like all players, he too will eventually retire. He too will rest from the sport. No one is actually a machine that can go on indefinitely.

We too, if you haven't already, will eventually retire and rest from a full-time job and not have so many things on your plate.

Our text speaks to us about rest. God's rest. His rest.

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest...”

And this rest is a very special rest, for it is a rest from all labors in the greatest rest and relaxation spot there is...heaven. Our text makes sure to emphasize that it is a sure thing. It remains. God's promises can't be broken (John 10:35). God keeps His word.

And God's word cannot be broken even if some people do not enter His rest. Even if some people don't receive the heavenly rest that God so graciously offers to all people, it doesn't invalidate it or nullify it. No! The promise remains!

Last week we especially heard in the previous chapter, Hebrews 3, how the Israelites were taken under God's wing and protection as He guided them out of Egypt to the promised land. Yet, they did not trust in Him and hardened their hearts so that God swore an oath against them. Do you remember what God swore?

““Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’ 11 So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ” (Hebrews 3:7-11)

They will not enter “My rest”. It's God's to give. And all those unbelieving Israelites not only did not enter the promised land, but they did not enter, most importantly, heaven. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10, **“For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” (1 Corinthians 10:4-5)**

And a little further he writes, **“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11)**

Oh, how God is patient and merciful, but must be just to all who reject Him. Last week we heard the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus wanting to know how he could have eternal rest...how he could have eternal life. And Jesus reminded him of the commandments. For keeping these perfectly would be the way to enter heaven.

Oh, I've got this. Since, my youth I've kept them, replied the young man. Really? How about the very first commandment of having no other gods before Me? Give your possessions to the poor and follow Me. But he couldn't, because his riches were his god. He trusted his riches and so his heart left in sadness.

Today's Gospel, picks up with the disciples wanting Jesus to give some explanation to what they just witnessed and hear. Jesus told them, that it is impossible for man to obtain God's eternal rest. Each of us has not kept His law perfectly. We haven't pitched a perfect game in life. We've thrown some passed balls that have gotten past the catcher. We've hit some batters with some offenses.

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it.”

Let us not be like the Israelites and harden our hearts against God. Let us fear God, that He indeed will keep His promise that all who would not repent, will not see His rest, but eternal condemnation!

But as sure as this promise of eternal punishment is, God wants us to be sure that His promise of eternal rest can never be annulled.

II. This rest is entered through faith in the Great High Priest, Jesus

Through your baptism, God has done the impossible for you! He has washed your sins away because you are united with the death and resurrection of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ! He has guaranteed eternal rest to you. Listen again to our text.

“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 who have believed do enter that rest.”

You who have believed do enter that rest! Why? Because the Gospel that has been preached to you of Jesus Christ is profit to you. For it has created faith in your heart who have heard it and believed it.

You have come to church this morning to especially receive rest for your souls from the restlessness that sin creates in your hearts. You have confessed your sins at the beginning of this service and God through the words of His representative pastor has absolved you completely of your sins. Your soul is at rest when God says to you, “I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Last, week I also mentioned a tax-collector named Zaccheus who got his riches from cheating people. Yet, Jesus offered him true riches. Come down out of that tree for I’m going to your house today. But he’s a sinner, grumbled the people. Yes, we all are. It’s impossible remember to enter heaven for all people. But remember what Jesus said.

“Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Today, salvation has come to your house, your soul. For Jesus sought you, saved you through your baptism and now you are no longer lost, but a child of God. Listen how our epistle speaks now of this special relationship with God.
“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” (Hebrews 4:9)

This rest cannot be taken away from God’s people. It is yours by faith. It is especially called a Sabbath rest here in this verse. As God rested on the 7th day, so His people also rest with their God. They are connected to God by faith and enjoy what God enjoys, even now.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus said in Matthew 11:28. He gives rest to the soul even now, especially now. He gives rest to your soul as you eat His very body and blood that is in, with and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. “Take and eat, this is My body given for you”, for your soul, for your rest, even now.

And this is only possible because of what our text tells us. **“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”**

Jesus our High Priest became like us, like His brethren as we heard in chapter 2 of Hebrews. He partook of our flesh and blood. Listen again to verses 14 and 15.

“He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Hebrew 2:14-15)

Jesus, the High Priest, offered Himself on the altar of the cross. He died that death can no longer can make our hearts restless with fear. He rose again to give us our resurrection and eternal life. Indeed, our bodies that are laid to rest, but sleep as they await the final resurrection at Jesus coming. Then, He will take all the resurrected believers, body and soul, into eternal rest!

Yes, for all our sins, we were pulled from the mound and sent to the bench by the Triune Manager, God Himself. In in our place, came the reliever of relievers, our Great High Priest, Jesus, who got the save! He saved all mankind by pitching the perfect game.

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

Without sin! Jesus did the impossible. For only with God are all things possible. His perfect life has forgiven you all your sins and has opened up heaven, your eternal rest to you!

Seeing then, that we have a High Priest who has done all this...that He has ascended into Heaven, having passed through the heavens, hold fast your confession. Don't be like the Israelites in the wilderness. But, make sure you come often to God's throne of grace to receive His mercy and strength for your soul that you run the race until the end, holding the faith.

So our epistle concludes, **“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)**

Boldly we come... for God's promises of mercy for the miserable, and grace for the undeserving remain. We can depend on God in our time of need, because we have our Great High Priest Jesus! Now and always!

“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.” (Revelation 14:13)

Thanks be to God! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)