

Rev. David R. Solum  
1<sup>st</sup> Midweek Lenten Sermon  
“Christ is Our Rest”  
Immanuel Lutheran, Michigan City  
Leviticus 25:1-12; Hebrews 4:9-13; Luke 4:16-30

I don't think I need to do much to convince you that we need more rest in our lives! How many times I just wished there were more hours in the day, or days in a week, or weeks in a month, or months in a year! Time goes by in lightning speed and we always find ourselves scrambling to keep up. Most of us are overworked. Even our children are overworked. Children don't have time to play outside or goof around anymore. We have their lives so jam-packed with homework and activities that they can't hardly have a childhood. If you have several older children, you almost never leave your vehicle from driving all of them around. Some of you can remember the days when most things closed on the weekend, especially Sunday and when Sunday was a family day for church and meals together afterward. Now we work right on through it. Anxiety, depression, heart problems, and troubled children are all symptoms of our lack of rest.

Even when we have time to rest, sometimes our bodies and the world around us afflict us so much that we still cannot. Arthritis can keep you from sleeping soundly. Various afflictions of this world like sickness, financial trouble, family problems, bad weather, and the fear of all of these things can take away your peace. I think about the coronavirus and the economic scare of late. We can become overly panicked and lose our trust in God – not that we shouldn't be prepared or cautious, but that we also shouldn't let them debilitate us and keep us from serving others and living our lives with hope.

But also, I should add, that you can observe a day of resting from work and break the Sabbath. We often forget that we are composed of a body and a soul. While the body and mind need physical rest, the soul needs spiritual rest, to find peace with God and receive His heavenly gifts. Thus, if we are resting physically, but not honoring God's Word as we should, we will not have true rest. True rest means that we are reconciled with the Creator who gives us new life and salvation from all evil, and who provides for every earthly need. When we do not observe God's rest, our bodies, our minds, and our souls, and the whole creation suffers.

When the Lord created the universe, He rested on the seventh day. That is, after six days of creating work, God ceased to create new things and enjoyed His completed, "very good" creation. It was very good because the entire world obeyed God's command and worked exactly as He intended it. Adam and Eve loved and trusted God above all things, and loved each other as God loved them. They would have perfect dominion over the earth as God had over them. They would have procreated and blessed the creation in their care of it and the creation would've returned to them such an abundance that they would never have need of anything.

But in came the serpent and made them restless. He made them discontent with the knowledge they had and tempted them to disobey God's Word. And when they did, they cursed the entire creation. Childbearing and bringing up children will be terribly painful and difficult. Marriage will be a chore. And for Adam thorns and thistles will spring up and make his work a burden. What once sustained mankind, would also now turn against them. The land, sea, and climate – although still sustaining life – became deadly. Animals killed each other and attacked humans. And all the coming generations of human beings were born with original sin, so that they had no desire or ability to have peace with God. Adam and Eve, life became a tiresome and painful

chore. They would literally work themselves to death. But God did promise them, that one day an offspring of the woman would crush the head of the one who took away their rest. And as a pledge of His continued mercy, God clothed them with animal skins.

Later the Lord would give them a command to help them and the whole creation to find rest. They would keep the seventh day as a holy day of rest for them, their servants, animals, and land. This would be a day that everyone would refrain from labor, especially that which produces an income. They would remember that everything in the creation is a gift from God, from bodily health to a good harvest and income to family and good government and so forth. They could rest in the Lord, knowing that He will provide for them.

But the Sabbath was not only connected with the seventh day of creation. In Deuteronomy 5 the commandment was associated with the Exodus, that they were once slaves in Egypt, but God saved them and made them His holy people. Part of their rest was also remembering and putting their faith in the saving works of God. Thus, on the Sabbath they gave their sacrifices and received forgiveness for their sins and instruction in God's Word. They sang God's praises and found their peace in the Lord, from whose grace and mercy every good thing comes.

Thus, every church festival revolved around the Sabbath or was called a Sabbath. For example, the Atonement, although it was celebrated on the tenth day of the seventh month and therefore didn't necessarily fall on a Saturday, was called a Sabbath of Sabbaths because of the sacrifice made to pay for the sins of the people. In it the people received rest because they were reconciled to God again.

God intended the Sabbath for not only human beings, but for the work animals and land itself, because all were affected by the fall into sin and likewise need their rest. Before the fall, animals would not become tired, nor would the soil lose its nutrients and be unable to yield a good crop. Animals would work with ease and the land would always produce an abundance. But that is no longer the case. Thus, animals also rested on the seventh day, and for the land, God commanded a Sabbath Year. On the seventh year the people were not allowed to sow or reap, prune or gather the fruits. The land will be allowed to rest and the Lord promised He would provide plenty on the sixth year to feed them for the seventh.

One more Sabbath celebration was needed. For God never intended people to become indebted to each other and have the need to sell their properties and become indentured servants. This would also keep them from their rest. So, God instituted the Year of Jubilee. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year, but on the seventh Sabbath year, the 49<sup>th</sup> year, a Year of Jubilee would be declared. Slaves must be released, debts forgiven or paid off, and property returned. Either the debtor would pay back what was owed or the closest relative would redeem them, that is, buy back their homes and property. Life was restored as God intended it. For the Lord had rescued Israel from slavery and gave them their land and made His covenant with them. He did not want to live like they had in Egypt.

The Lord reminded His people that the true Sabbath was when all were right with Him and with each other and with the creation. This, of course, was impossible to be realized through the Law of Moses, although the Law pointed to it. No matter what commands were in place, people failed to obey them and to fulfill God's intended purpose for them. But the prophet Isaiah alluded to a time when the true Sabbath will be restored. In chapter 61, Isaiah prophesied, "The

Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor....”

Isaiah was referring to the Jubilee Year. But this was no ordinary Jubilee. All oppression which came as a result of the curse of sin would be taken away. Even the blind would see again! This would set up an eternal kingdom in which everything would be restored to its proper state of harmony with the Creator.

Jesus inaugurated His ministry with the proclamation of this rest by the prophet Isaiah and finished by saying, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” No wonder they were so offended! Jesus was saying that He was ushering in this new Jubilee and was actually going to restore God's people and the whole creation to the Creator!

In what way did Jesus do this? You'll notice in the Gospels how often Jesus was teaching and healing on the Sabbath. His work of undoing the curse of this world would give people true and lasting rest. Especially connected to his healing and teaching was the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus would forgive sins and then heal a person, showing that our restoration of body and soul begins with God reconciling Himself to us.

But all of this offended the leaders of the Jews, who thought that Jesus was breaking the law by working on the Sabbath. Jesus responded to them in two ways. First, what was the true intention of the Sabbath? To do good or bad? To help or harm? By helping others Jesus was obeying the true heart of the commandment. He was giving people rest from their afflictions. To allow harm to come to someone when you can help them would actually violate the Sabbath.

Secondly, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. That is, the Sabbath rest was intended as a time for God to give the people His gifts and make them rest in their salvation. Since Jesus is the God who gives these gifts, it is more than proper for Him to be working on the Sabbath.

Christ came in order to give you rest. He made holy all things by pouring out His holy blood for the sins of the world. In Him the Sabbath laws and the sacrificial system are fulfilled since they pointed to the eternal peace we would find in Jesus' salvation. Thus, there is no specific day in which we must have rest as there was in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, we are commanded to find rest in Him. And so, it is good to choose a day in which to cease from work and receive God's gifts, lest we fall back into sin and put our trust in our own work and fail to find rest in God. The first Christians chose Sunday, since it is the day of Christ's resurrection. It is sometimes called the eighth day, a Biblical number which symbolizes the new life that God gives.

The resurrection of Christ gives us peace that all His sacrificial works for us were accepted by the Father and He has declared us to be righteous or "right with God." Every Divine Service Christ gives us peace as we share in His victory over our worst enemies: sin, death, and the devil. In Jesus, nothing can separate us from the love of the Father and our eternal home with Him. This should give our lives peace each day, to know that we have already what really matters by the grace of God. Our works do not get us any closer to God. They are done only to serve our neighbor.

Our God is truly generous for us, in that, though He has given us His greatest treasure, the kingdom of heaven, He continues to lavish us with His gifts on earth for the body. He cares that

we receive our daily bread. He gives us the little things we need in this life for our health and strength and general wellbeing, all of which we do not deserve but have because of His merciful goodness.

And when we go without some of these things and suffer, we still remember that God has not taken away the best from us. He promises to give us His power to endure and persevere until He delivers us to our eternal rest. Christ, who has conquered death's power, has made sure that in our death, we will rest from our labors. No more will we work by the sweat of our brow and suffer the world's curse. We will enter perfect joy and peace and reign in life with Christ forever. And when Christ returns, we will be raised from the dead, endowed with new vigor and full of the Holy Spirit. Soul and body will unite again to live in perfect harmony with God in the new creation. And that old evil foe, the disturber of mankind, will be thrown into the lake of fire and everything impure will be burned up. This will begin our eternal Sabbath, as the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 66, "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD." Amen.