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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
March 11, 2018  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent

Scripture Lessons: Numbers 21:4-9; Passion: Herod & Barabbas  
Hymns: 155; 390; 145; 172:7-8 (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 4:1-11

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us  
be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.<sup>2</sup> For  
we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did;  
but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they  
did not share the faith of those who obeyed.<sup>3</sup> Now we who have  
believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“So I declared on oath in my anger,  
“They shall never enter my rest.””

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the  
world.<sup>4</sup> For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in  
these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.”

<sup>5</sup> And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter  
my rest.”

<sup>6</sup> Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and  
since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them  
did not go in because of their disobedience,<sup>7</sup> God again set a  
certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later  
he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

“Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts.”

<sup>8</sup> For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken  
later about another day.<sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for  
the people of God;<sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God's rest also rests  
from their works, just as God did from his.<sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore,

make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: “Pastor, I’m tired.” --

In nearly forty-three years of ministry I’ve heard that statement more times than I could even begin to count. I’ve heard it from the elderly, and while you might think, “Yes, of course elderly people tire easily,” that is not what they were talking about. They were referencing the pilgrimage they have walked in this life. After many years of dealing with the trials and temptations and frustrations, and tribulations of this life they confide in the pastor that they are tired, not just physically, but emotionally, and even spiritually. They will often continue to confide that they are eager to be with the Lord, and with their loved ones who have already ended their pilgrimage.

I hear this also from the chronically ill. Those who have been enduring many medical treatments over many months and even years find that their hope for deliverance in this life is not so appealing as that blessed hope for deliverance to eternal life. Then there will be no more cancer and chemo therapy, or kidney disease and endless increasingly painful dialysis. They confide that they know that every day of life is a precious gift from God, but they yearn for that greater gift of eternal life in heaven. They’re tired and they are ready to rest.

Occasionally the confession of “Pastor, I’m tired.” comes from one who has been struggling with sin, a sin that keeps plaguing them and then keeps plaguing their conscience. Indeed, a burdened conscience can make one tired. King David experienced this kind of tired himself and was led by the Holy Spirit to write of it in Psalm 32.

**Psalm 32:3-4** When I kept silent, my bones grew old

Through my groaning all the day long.

<sup>4</sup> For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;  
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.”

There is one answer, one key to this kind of tired:

**THEME: Looking to Jesus Who Endured the Cross;  
He Is Our Rest.**

It is important to remember the reason this epistle was written. Jewish Christians were being tempted, even pressured to look back where they came from for assurance of salvation instead of continuing to look exclusively to Jesus who endured the cross for them. So in our text this morning they are reminded that –

**I. Other Promises of Rest Fail because of Disobedience.**

So we begin with this warning from the inspired writer:

**Hebrews 4:1-3a** “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. <sup>2</sup>For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. <sup>3</sup>Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest.””

The reference is to the Children of Israel when they reached the borders of the Promised Land for the first time. After months of traveling with all their belongings, living in tents, trying to keep their animals alive (it had been quite a pilgrimage) they were right there on the borders of the land the Lord had promised to them. Moses had led them right up to the border and all that was left for them to do was to enter the Promised Land and take possession of it. But when they received the report of the ten unbelieving spies they accused God of bringing them to the land of Canaan to kill them. They looked back to Egypt where they had been harshly enslaved as their hope for rest.

The result of this unbelief was the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. None of those above twenty years of age would enter the Promised Land, that promised rest. Disobedience and unbelief had stolen their hope. They had looked back from where they had come and chosen that slavery rather than God's promised rest. They had received the gospel in its gracious promises but they let it slip away, yearning to go back to Egypt.

So the message for the Jewish Christians was clear; "Why would you want to look back from where you have come and try to secure rest for your souls by observing the law?" That is the kind of unbelief that would disqualify you from receiving that rest. They would all fall under the same condemnation of these who died in the wilderness, "They shall never enter my rest!"

So the message for us today is just as clear. We also are under pressure from the world to turn back away from the truth of God's Word, to question God's promises. The world expects us to rely on reason, societal values, and ideas of self-righteousness. This is the propaganda that surrounds us constantly both in the entertainment and the news media. Sadly, it has been adopted by many "mainstream" churches in our country. We are labeled as backward, bigoted, and ignorant. That's the world's pressure to turn back to the world, and seek our spiritual rest there. That is unbelief. The end is God's judgment, "They shall never enter My rest." From this preserve us dear Father in heaven!

The alternative is far better, and it is found in --

## **II. The Obedience of Faith.**

Listen to these words of grace and promise.

**Hebrews 4:6-7** Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, <sup>7</sup> God again set a certain day, calling it "Today." This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

"It still remains for some shall enter that rest." (v.6) It isn't too late. It hasn't passed us by. It wasn't completed by the children of Israel

entering the Promised Land any more than it was completed by God resting on the seventh day. Rather these both pointed forward to another day, a day King David referenced hundreds of years later, pointing forward to a day that was yet to come. The message for the Jewish believers was, “Don’t harden your hearts.” Stay true to the words and promises of God. The day of salvation, the day of grace had come to them in the day they heard the gospel, and the Holy Spirit had called them to faith in that Gospel.

That is the message for you and me as well. We need to keep looking to Jesus, and not to our works, not to our fleshly desires, not to our reason for guidance in life. That day of grace has come to us. The gospel of a crucified Savior has been brought to us with the message of God’s love and forgiveness that comes to us “freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24)

We also note these words of the Apostle Paul:

**1 Corinthians 2:1-2** We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup>For He says: “In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.

This message of God’s love has been preached to you. This is your day of salvation. This message declared for you, that a Rest remains for the Child of God. We find --

### **III. The Promise of Rest in Jesus.**

**Hebrews 4:8-11** For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. <sup>9</sup>There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup>for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup>Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

The Lord speaks to us of another day, a day that is still coming, a promise that is still to be fulfilled in Jesus, who shall come again to receive us to Himself. The last enemy that He shall defeat is death.

When He comes again in the clouds with glory He shall call all forth from the grave. The people of God we shall enter into that rest. He will say, "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*" (Matthew 25:34)

We find that rest beginning right now. We hear Jesus' invitation.

**Matthew 11:28-29** "Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>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."

By the gracious calling of the Holy Spirit we already know this rest for our souls. As we come to Jesus, we observe Him with eyes of faith as the One who endured the cross for us. We see how Jesus lifted the burden of sin and guilt from our hearts. We joyfully follow Him for He is gentle and lowly in heart. He came and humbled Himself, putting our wellbeing ahead of His own, taking the abuse of sinful men, enduring the wrath of God, sacrificing His life for ours, that He might secure rest for our souls.

Now we possess peace with God. Now we possess the hope of everlasting life. Let us now give this hope due diligence. Let us heed the exhortation of our text that we make every effort to enter into that rest. Stay focused on the prize of the upward calling of God. Keep your eyes looking at Jesus who endured the cross, not being distracted by the mundane pursuits of this world, the pleasures of the flesh, or the temporary possessions of this life. Make every effort to stay focused on Jesus, and building up your faith with a steady diet of gospel in Word and sacrament. Shun sin which would undermine our faith, and lead us into unbelief and ultimately despair.

We look forward to that Day. looking to Jesus who endured the cross: He is our Rest.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.