

Grace, mercy, peace, and rest be to you from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Has it been a long week? Only one week ago, we discussed the ever-present danger of losing our faith, of the attacks that are always coming our way to steal from us the assured hope of entering the promised land, and yet here you are. Your faith still present, the hope you've been given still secure. You've waded your way through seven more days, seven more nights. Seven more rotations of the earth filled with only-you know-what.

Certainly some weeks are filled with joy and wonder and excitement as things go right—work isn't stressful, a new baby is born into the family, you and your spouse or your children are really “clicking” and the days seem to fly by because life is good. And I hope that you had a week like this! But I am sure that not all of you wish you could relive the past week, and those of you who had great weeks, I know you've had bad ones too, at one time or another.

You know what I'm talking about. When it's Thursday afternoon and you cannot wait until the weekend and then you check the computer and it's actually only 9:15—on Tuesday morning. How can you drag yourself through another 3 and a half days of this? Or maybe you've been up 3 times a night for the passed 6 months with back pain, or you're watching your parents fade away and it feels like you can't offer them any comfort. Maybe you've lost your job, or the job you've been faithful to for so long still doesn't pay the bills. Or maybe the people you work around make each day remarkably unfulfilling as you have to remind them over and over again of what they are to be doing. Whatever has made this week hard for you, whatever has made your life draining, I so am glad that you are here today once again to hear God's good news for you to refresh you amidst all that has attacked you and your faith.

So I hope you brought your pillow and a cozy blanket because this week the Epistle lesson highlights the wonderful rest that we have in Christ. We gather here, in the *sanctuary*, to

find refuge from the trials of the world—mental, physical, and spiritual trials. Here, no matter what has gone on the past 6 days or 6 months you are welcome to just sit, (take a breath) to breathe, (pause) to be.

Here in the house of the Lord we began in the name of the Triune God, the name into which you were baptized and cleansed. And then we received anew His forgiveness for today in our confession and the declaration of grace. Because of everything He has done for you, you are welcomed into the Lord's presence. He has broken down the barrier between you and God, satisfying and thus pacifying His anger against your sin and making way for His love to be communicated and given directly to you. You have been united in faith with all who believe, and thus the rest given here is yours (Hebrews 4:2). No matter what has frustrated you this week, no matter what sins have arisen, sit and stay a while.

And no matter what threatens you outside these walls, what you've fled and dread returning to, you have been bought and are His forever. No matter what your days look like, you are His and here in this place, in His house and in His presence, you can drop your shoulders, close your eyes, and breathe freely because His peace is your peace. Unlike the Israelites who turned in disbelief and were therefore kept from the rest of God, He has kept your faith alive throughout the turmoil of life and He gives you free access to His rest.

He has brought you here to give you a reprieve from the week past, to give you rest from what has happened, and may this give you the energy to return, living in Christ, to whatever circumstances you find in this week coming.

But Christ doesn't only give you rest to refresh you from the past for the upcoming days and weeks—He is more than a just relaxing sleep. He is also here, present, to give you rest as if you were lying on the operating table, counting down from 10, 9, 8...7.....6.....

I'm not sure about you, but when you lay on the operating table, about to be cut open, healed, but nonetheless cut open, I can't imagine myself being too relaxed. Certainly I know doctors are trained, and they have thought through what the surgery is going to be like, but still—you are placing yourself, your arms and legs, your lungs and brains, your life itself into the hands of another, hoping that things will go well enough for you to wake up in a few hours, hopefully healed

But our text describes the perfection of the surgeon that we encounter today. And because of who He is and what He works with, you may rest assured that the work being done on you will be truly excellent.

Every Sunday, in the divine service, in the liturgy and specifically in the Service of the Word, we come into the presence of the living God and are met with His Holy Word. This is a Word that is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12-13)

This Word is sharp and precise, working quickly to divide the sin which entangles us and the person whom Christ has redeemed. His Law sets forth just how life is supposed to be and shows us just *all* the places where we've fallen short, and His Gospel highlights just how faithful Christ was, for our sake, in all of the places where we've stumbled and fumbled. This killing and resurrecting of the Law and Gospel, the Word of God, is what Christ uses to drown our old self and raise up a perfect, saintly self in its place. All this happens as you lie on the operating table, here in the pews.

And the on other end of the perfect tools is the one who can see absolutely everything—before Him we are naked, exposed, and vulnerable. (4:13) He can see through the mess we've

made and the masks we hide behind. He sees the web of bad decisions and horrible consequences and confusing situations, and He is all powerful to do what He will with our lives. Thankfully He has marked us as His own, uniting us in faith (4:2) with His Son whom He loves, so we rest, knowing that we can't tie a knot of sin too tightly around our heart that He cannot slip the blade of the Law under the wire and cut it loose, freeing us from our sin and shame by His Gospel. We know that He, our High Priest (4:14-16) and surgeon is not against us but for us (Romans 8:28), working out our good as He works on us.

So we may rest, knowing that He who knows everything knows what our future holds and is preparing us for them. The words you hear today get you ready to deal with situations at work and at home. They will still be in your head to remind you that you are forgiven when you sin while driving or cooking; they will resonate in your ears as you walk alone at night or sit by a student having a melt-down or a patient in despair. Do not fret what this week will hold because Christ is holding you, and He is preparing you each and every Sunday to get through what is coming on the calendar.

So we may rest today, neither torn apart by our past nor fretting our futures. This rest is given to us, Sunday by Sunday, so we may be sustained in the faith until the day when the rest of God is all we know, a rest sort of like a stress-free retirement.

This is the rest that was intended in the beginning, when God finished the work of His creation (4:4), when Adam and Eve were able to simply enjoy the world without sin and its consequences. They had perfect communion with God and with each other, living in peace, in tranquility, celebrating the life that would last forever.

When they gave up that rest by tasting of the fruit, God had already, from the beginning of all that exists, He had finished the work that would be required to re-establish that perfect, lasting rest. (4:3)

The Israelites were going to receive a *type* of this rest when they entered the promised land—they would no longer be slaves, no longer be wanderers, and they were supposed to live there, not bothered by nearby nations indefinitely. Their sin brought an end to that *temporal* resting.

But David pointed to a different rest (4:7-8), a fuller rest and Christ fulfilled this by His death and resurrection. On the cross He endured the opposite of rest—turmoil and despair, agony and exhaustion were His lot as He hung there, but in the resurrection and ascension He led the way to the truest rest we will ever experience. It will one day be all that we know.

Yet here and now we partake in that eternal rest, living in the presence of God Himself together with all of His children, and in this place, though not today, but next Sunday, we receive a foretaste of the feast to come. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of a remaining Sabbath rest—the term used really means more than the regular Sabbath where they weren't to do any work, but a Sabbath celebration (4:9), one where the people brought their festival meals to the temple so they could partake in the fruit of their labours in the presence of the Lord and one another. They experienced community with God's people and were able to come into the Temple to feast with Him.

Every Sunday we receive that pleasure as we are welcomed to the table prepared by Him. He is the host, He is the meal, He is the celebrant and we are merely the guests, welcomed by His grace to experience here in time what will one day be our eternity. Here at the table, we are gifted His rest, and here we see the reality of what rest is.

This rest that we partake of is simply faith. We rest from our works (4:10) as we receive the assurance that He has taken care of our sin and guilt and is taking care of us, our todays and our tomorrows. Out of His love He cares for our needs of body, mind, and soul, and through the gifts He loves to give He ensures us that we will be His throughout this life until eternity.

May you and I, today and everyday, rest in this promise—trust in the promise of His Gospel grace. May we find rest from our past and rest for our tomorrows, rest that will take care of us through whatever our days hold, until all we know is His eternal rest.

Amen.

Now may the peace rest of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds on Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.