

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Pentecost 2  
June 6, 2021  
Sermon by Pastor Richard Starr  
**Rest**

—Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Sometimes shadows can be useful. For example, I usually eat my breakfast on my patio and listen to my devotion from the WELS. Sometimes I hear a person walking on the sidewalk from behind me. I don't have to leave my chair to see who it is. I simply can watch the shadow of the person coming to learn something about him or her. The shadow tells me something about the height, size, and gender of the one who is coming my way. Of course, once the person has rounded the corner of the patio, I look directly at him or her instead of the shadow.

God's Sabbath law for his Old Testament people was like that shadow. It told them somewhat of the Savior who was coming around the corner of the New Testament. As they rested from physical work on the Sabbath, they were to look ahead to the one coming to bring them rest from the sins that wearied their souls.

The Rest God Offers

Our English word "Sabbath" comes from the Hebrew word "Shabbat," which means rest. Observant Jews—those who try to obey all the Old Testament laws, rules, and regulations—still observe Saturday as a day of absolute rest, a day to abstain from all physical labor. In Israel you will find "Shabbat elevators." They are installed to accommodate observant Jews on Saturdays. They will stop at every floor so that the user does not have to do the work of pushing any buttons. Closer to home, you may have a refrigerator/freezer like mine that has a Sabbath Day setting. If that mode is engaged, the refrigerator/freezer will not dispense any water or ice on Saturday, eliminating the temptation for the observant Jew to do the work of pushing the paddle on the refrigerator/freezer on Saturday. My friends, that is NOT what the Sabbath is all about.

The real Sabbath is eternal rest. It's about undisturbed fellowship with God. It's about being at peace with God. It's about being able to walk and talk again with God as Adam and Eve did in the garden, before sin brought shame and fear and death and judgment. And it's about being able to look forward with absolute confidence to the perfect walk with God in heaven.

This heavenly rest does not come because we refrain from doing any work—not even pushing elevator buttons or refrigerator paddles—on Saturday. This heavenly rest comes only through Jesus. Because of the Savior's full payment for sin's debt, we human beings can once again stand before God in peace. God offers this beautiful rest for sin-troubled souls in his Word. Nowhere else can humankind find Christ's rest. Only in the Word is forgiveness offered, and only through the Word does the Spirit work faith in the sinner's heart to receive it.

For God's Old Testament people, the Third Commandment did indeed mandate a day of rest for their bodies. Even more though, it was intended to raise their eyes in expectant faith to the Savior whose coming would bring rest for their souls. In this sense the Sabbath day was a shadow of Christ. Now that our rest bringer has come, we look no longer at the shadow but directly at Jesus. For us as New Testament Christians, the Third Commandment speaks not about what to do with a particular day of the week that was only a shadow but with God's Word that brings true rest for our souls. For us this commandment is an invitation to think back to Eden and what life was once like, and to think ahead to eternity and what our life with God will be like because of Jesus.

This looking ahead is **the rest we need**. It is rest that we need right here and now, but how do we get it and keep it consistently? Let me illustrate. One thing kept the downed Air Force pilot going during his months in the Vietcong prison camp. It was the last letter from his wife that he had tucked in his flight-suit pocket before takeoff. Again and again he read it until its edges were tattered and the creases torn. We've received a love letter from God. In it he tells us about the relationship that he wants with us and has made possible for us through our Savior, Jesus. How are we using his Word? Are we "holding it sacred," more dear to us than that aviator's letter? Do we show how precious is the book divine by the way we "gladly hear and learn it"? When it's time for public worship, do we rejoice with those who say, "**Let us go to the house of the LORD**" (Psalm 122:1)? In our personal daily devotions, do we say with Jeremiah, "**When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight**" (15:16)? Few of us would say that we don't need the rest God has prepared for us in Jesus. Few of us would say that his Word, in which that rest is offered, isn't precious to us. Hopefully our everyday actions say the same thing.

I am reminded of how in one of my former congregations, almost every Sunday, an elderly believer would voice his concern to me. Bob had refused to join the congregation until after his wife's death. Then he came because he wanted to find the peace she had shown in her struggle with the cancer that ended her life. Walking out of church on Sunday, he would lament to me, "Why was I so foolish? Why did I wait so long? Why did I cheat myself out of so much?" "Gladly," Luther said in his Small Catechism, "Gladly hear and learn it." Bob agreed. He knew what he had missed and how much he needed it. And he knew where to find Christ's precious rest for his soul—in the Word.

Let us pray: Lord, "Let your Word e'er be my pleasure and my heart's most precious treasure." Amen. (CW 283:1).