



TRI-PARISH MAIL MINISTRY

Grace
Valentine

Peace
Mission

St. Paul's
White River

Trinity 17

September 22, 2024

Pre-Service Meditation: Psalm 33

Hymns: 238; 351; 292:1-5, 8-9

Scripture Readings: Psalm 75:4-7
Matthew 12:1-8

Sermon Topic:

In Jesus' Name!

Text: Hebrews 4:9-13 NKJV

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

In Christ Jesus, through whom we receive the certain hope of life in heaven, dear fellow redeemed:

How has your life been recently? Good...bad...in between? Have you or one of your loved ones been sick, or had to go to the hospital for emergency care? Have the recent strong winds or area wildfires damaged or endangered any of your property or the property of those living close to you? Have you found yourself concerned about finances—too many bills, too little income...stressed at times to the point of exhaustion? Are you glad to see Fridays come, so that you can finally rest? On the other hand, I would imagine that for some of you weekends are almost more hectic than workweeks—so much so, that returning to work on Monday may well be somewhat of a relief!

This, unfortunately, is the nature of many of our lives. We often speak of life as a “rat-race.” We are confronted by all sorts of issues, which are the direct or indirect consequences of sin—violations of God’s commandments to love both God and each other. It can all be somewhat depressing! That is why it is so important that we recharge ourselves with God’s Word on a regular basis. Our God has revealed in His Word a message of hope, which centers on the thought expressed in the first verse of our text—**THERE REMAINS A REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!** The rest, of which the writer speaks, is heaven. Even though we must confess that we have sinned and deserve nothing but God’s eternal judgment, we believe and confess that because of Jesus—His perfect life and innocent death, we have complete forgiveness and the certain hope of everlasting life in heaven. There we will indeed be at rest—free of sin and all its consequences. That will be wonderful! It is surely something we can anticipate with delight! But, my dear friends, that rest lies in the future. It is ours by faith, but we will not enjoy that gift until our Lord takes us home. In the meantime our God has a number of things to say to us.

I.

First, He would have us **be diligent to enter that rest!** The author of our text writes: “*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fail according to the example of disobedience.*” Heaven is ours—a gift of our gracious God, but it can be lost. We can turn away from our God and reject His gift in disobedience and unbelief just like the children of Israel in the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt. This was example the author of Hebrews used as a warning for his first century readers. Thereby, we too are urged to make diligent use of our time, our talents, and our treasures—as mentioned in our sermon last week—as we make our way through the wilderness of this life enroute to our Promised Land in heaven.

Recall, if you will, for a few moments the children of Israel as described in those early books written by Moses. God delivered them from slavery in Egypt by sending ten plagues upon Egypt. The people were given tremendous amounts of wealth by the Egyptians as they left Egypt. They were now free. They were now wealthy. They had a sure and certain future in the promised land of Canaan. All they had to do was faithfully follow the LORD, for He had promised to guide them and bless them on their way. But this did not happen. The people became distracted by their physical needs and desires. The rigors of the road caused them to complain about God, rather than to turn to Him in prayer. In their minds, the LORD was simply not living up to their expectations! Time after time, they misused their talents and treasures to oppose the will of God. Think of the waters of Meribah, the incident of the golden calf, their refusal to enter the Promised Land, or the occasion of the brazen serpent. An entire generation was lost due to their rebellion!

My dear friends, let us not fall into the same trap! The children of Israel allowed the troubles and distractions of this present world to turn their eyes, minds, and hearts away from their God. Do not allow the same thing to happen to you. Do not spend your time complaining about God, but rather spend it in petitioning Him in prayer. Do not spend your treasures securing vast quantities of material possessions, which can become a rival of God in your heart. Rather, be eager and diligent to stay close to your God, embracing His promises by faith and using His gifts to the glory of His name and the blessing of others. Notice how the apostle Paul ties the certainty we have of our future hope in heaven to dealing with the troubles of this life. He writes: *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope”* (Rom. 5:1-4). Paul’s point is that in view of our sure and certain future in heaven, we can be confident that God will turn all the troubles of this life into opportunities to grow and become stronger Christians, who will gladly serve both Him and others. Let us, therefore, **be diligent to enter the rest of our God!**

II.

Second, let us **make use of the living and powerful word of God!** Our text says: *“The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* A front-line soldier does not go into battle without his weapon, nor would his commander send him into battle unless he knew how to use his weapon. I am afraid, however, that many Christians go into battle each week against our spiritual enemies—Satan, this world, and our own sinful flesh—without taking the weapon of God’s Word with them or knowing how to use it well. We would say to any Marine walking into battle with empty hands—do not be so foolish! Your life depends on the effective use of your weapon. Should we not say the same to each other and to ourselves in our life battles?

We live in a world which disparages the Bible. People, who believe that it is the Word of God—truthful in all its parts and without any errors, are considered religious fanatics. They are considered intellectual dinosaurs. Do not buy into that kind of thinking! Who do such people think they are when they challenge the omnipotent and omniscient God? If God tells us that the Bible is His Word, and He does; if God tells us that His Word is true, and He does—who is any man to challenge Him? The Bible asserts that the *“wisdom of man is foolishness in God’s eyes”* (1 Cor. 1:18-31), and that man at his very best is like a *“flower that fades,”* while the *“word of God lives and abides forever”* (Is. 40:6-8).

Make use of God’s Word...make it a priority in your life, and you will experience God’s richest blessing! In the preface to his *Large Catechism*, Luther points out that those individuals, who devote time to the study of God’s Word on a daily basis, are blessed because their thoughts become dominated by the grace and wisdom of God. They can more easily oppose the wiles of Satan, avoid the temptation of the world, and overcome the desires of their sinful flesh. When that happens you are not confronted by the most serious of the consequences of sin, but rather find your life blessed.

But if we are going to read and study God's Word on a daily basis, we have to make it a priority in our lives. We must become intentional in our use of our Bibles. God's Word needs to be a priority for us, because it is powerful, and it protects us. It helps us define our values and our goals. It directs our decisions. It comforts us by assuring us of God's love, forgiveness, and abiding presence. **THERE REMAINS A REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD** in heaven! Until we get there **make use of the living and powerful word of God!**

III.

Third, **remember that we are all accountable to God!** Our text concludes: "*There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*" The country singer, Johnny Paycheck, years ago wrote a rather popular song entitled, "Take This Job and Shove It!" I believe that it was and remains popular because it typifies a predominant "in your face" attitude that is very prevalent in our American culture. It expresses the idea that we as Americans are independent and free. We do not have to accept things the way they are, if we do not like them. The little man can defy the big man, because he just can!

I am afraid that many people have that same attitude towards God and towards religion. If the Word of God happens to condemn their particular life-style, contradict their personal prejudices, restrict their individual desires, or offend their particular sensitivities, people have the attitude that they can just say to God, "Take this Bible truth and shove it!" People can do that, but they will not get away with it. You see, God does not operate on the basis of a democratic vote. If He did there would be no Savior, for the vast majority of the world feels no need for a Savior. They deem themselves quite self-sufficient! But that self-sufficiency and perceived independence is a delusion and a lie!

In reality, we depend upon our God for everything. But, the world cries out: "We work for what we get. What we achieve, we achieve on our own. We deserve the credit for our successes!" What is the reality? Paul expressed reality in his sermon in Athens: "*For in Him (that is, in God) we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28). Without the creative power of God, we would simply not exist. Without the preserving power of God, we would not continue to exist. We will all one day stand before our God to give an account of our lives. This is not to say that we are saved by our works. The Scripture is very clear that we are saved by God's grace through faith alone in the merits of Jesus Christ. But do our words and our actions confirm such a faith, or do they manifest a spirit of defiance and opposition to our God? We cannot live a lifestyle contrary to God's Word and then claim to be Christians. We cannot say, "I believe in you, God, but I want to call my own shots!" If such has been the attitude of any of us, may we be led to repentance, which is a sincere change of heart and mind. Let us heed our Lord's words, rejoice in His forgiveness, and conform our lives to His will, for then instead of either fearing or resisting the fact that we are accountable to God, we can rejoice in the fact that when the Lord reviews our lives on the last day, they will reflect the faith and the love He has so graciously planted within us.

My dear friends, amid the stresses, strains, and difficulties of your daily lives, permit me to assure you that **THERE REMAINS A REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD!** May we all be led by God in faith to those heavenly shores! Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Paul D. Nolting
To God alone be the glory!

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