

March 27, 2005
Easter Festival Worship
Exodus 20:1-8
Pastor Ott

We See Jesus Giving Us Rest

Sometimes it's nice just to get away, right? Sometimes you need to get away. At least that's what some commercials tell us. You know, when your contact gets stuck and you run into the bathroom and find out that you are in the wrong bathroom when the contact gets put back in—it's time to get away. Or when they are working on that painting with one grain of sand at a time, and you stop to take a picture of it on the commercial but instead you sneeze and blow it all over—it's time to get away.

Time to get away. Just ask my wife. There are times she would like to push me out the door and say it's time to get away. This afternoon it will be time to get away, probably not even afternoon. We'll go home and have our pizza and I'll bet you I'll get away and snore for awhile in a chair later this afternoon. It's nice at times to get away, to have rest, and that's really what the Sabbath regulations God gave in the Old Testament were all about.

This morning we are looking at one of the five places in the law that God commanded through Moses, the Sabbath, to be observed. Every seventh day, God's Old Testament people were supposed to get away from it all—to take a day of rest. This season during Lent we have looked at these Old Testament regulations and as we have peered into them, one thing we have seen over and over and over is how they were a picture of the Gospel—a picture of who Jesus is and what Jesus would do for us. On this Easter morning, as we think about the Sabbath, we see the same thing. As you look into these shadows, we see Jesus. And what we see Jesus doing is giving us rest. But it's not the kind of rest that I am going to enjoy in a rocker later today. It's a rest that centers in holiness, and it's a rest that is eternal.

It's easy to misunderstand this command about the Sabbath day. I think it often is. It wasn't just about rest from work. From all outward appearances though that's exactly what it looks like, right? In fact, when the Romans looked at the children of Israel, the Jews, they considered it just a sign of laziness, a character flaw in those people that every seventh day they didn't work. The idea that not even your slaves would work—slaves worked every day of their life and yet for the children of Israel, every seventh day the slaves were also not to work. But again the Sabbath regulation isn't about fair labor practices or physical rest, it's about much more.

This law is about spiritual rest. It's about finding a rest that comes from outside of ourselves. It's a law for God's people of the Old Testament, not for us today, but for those people. But in this law you could find a Gospel promise inside of it. The book of Hebrews said, *"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."* That's what God is talking about when he explains the meaning of the Sabbath. It's spiritual. It's not just physical.

As we come together today, the one true thing that we are reminded of is that this spiritual rest that we enjoy, the spiritual rest in the pronouncement that our sins are forgiven, comes to us because of Jesus' resurrection. The resurrection guarantees it.

This rest had to do with holiness. Moses said, *"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."* He made the Sabbath day holy because it's a picture of what he was going to do for us—make us holy. For six days they would work and they would toil and they would labor and they would be faced with all the things that frustrate you as you work and toil and labor. All those six days were to be a reminder that we live in a world that is sinful—it's not the way God intended it.

For Adam, tending the Garden was a joy. We might at times enjoy our work, but there are a lot of times that it frustrates us, doesn't it? What is going on in your work life right now? Are there things that put your stomach in knots? Things you might be called on the carpet for? Things that you have got to say to someone else that you are not looking forward to doing and you're wondering how you are going to do it? Do you have things in your work life that at times make you feel uncertain and shaky and weak in the knees?

That's a picture of sin. All of those things are a result of sin in the world. If there would be no sin there would be none of these things that bring us this kind of difficulty, anxiety or worry. Every pain and every sorrow that you and I endure in this world comes from sin. But this morning as we gather together, we gather together for rest, because we have been delivered from our sins. We come back to the tomb and see where Jesus was laid. We've returned to that place that on Friday was so dark and stark and black and grief-filled and now we look into the tomb and we see that Christ has risen. He was delivered over to death for our sins. He was raised to life for our justification. The empty tomb is the evidence that you and I have been declared not guilty of sin. Not because we are so good, not because we try so hard, but because Jesus was perfect in our place. Jesus took the punishment our sins deserve. And the resurrection assures us that our sins have been atoned for. All the hardships we face in our daily life are nothing compared to the hardship of sin and death and the punishment it deserves. But that hardship has been lifted off of us because God has made us holy.

The Sabbath pointed ahead to that. The Sabbath is all about trust, isn't it? How many of you farmers here take one day a week where you do absolutely nothing on the farm? Think of the trust that took for that society because that society was a society based on that kind of work. And yet one day a week, they left it all behind and said, "Lord, I trust you." At least that is what they were to do. That's what the Lord wanted them to learn.

As we come together today, we can set aside all of our trust in ourselves and in our work and in our efforts. We can set aside trusting in trying to do good and be good, because that is never going to be good enough. You and I can trust that Christ was perfect in our place and that his resurrection assures us our sins are paid for. The same God who, through his mighty power and his creative work said let there be light

and there was light, is the same God who came to us and through the work of the Holy Spirit said let this person be a Christian, and his Gospel worked faith in our hearts. Our confidence rests in him, not in ourselves, not in our efforts. Today, tomorrow and for the rest of eternity, you and I are holy in God's eyes because of what Jesus Christ has done.

The Sabbath teaches us about Jesus' holiness—what he has given to us and the comfort and the confidence that gives us in our daily lives. If I have to rely on myself and my work and my efforts to be right with God, think of how often there isn't going to be that confidence. It won't just be my wife wanting to push me out the door—it's God pushing me out the door then if I'm going to rely on myself. I don't have to. You don't have to. You're covered in Christ's holiness, in his righteousness, in his forgiveness. God pointed his Old Testament people ahead to that rest, and you and I live in that rest every day of our lives. We rest in holiness.

The Sabbath—it's one of the most prominent of the Old Testament laws. To this day, all Jewish communities still observe it even if the individuals do not. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah had specifically warned God's people that if they didn't stop breaking the Sabbath, Jerusalem would be destroyed. He lived to see that prophecy fulfilled.

Why was that law so important for God's Old Testament people?—because the Sabbath holds out the promise of eternal life. The rest that he talks about is eternal. Isaiah wrote about it in the last chapter, almost of the last verses of the book he wrote. He said, *"From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me"*—picturing the eternal rest that God's people will enjoy after Jesus returns. He pictures it really as a succession of Sabbaths—one rest-filled day after another when we enjoy the presence and the glory of God. That's what God is talking about when he says there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. This rest we enjoy imperfectly in this life, but we will enjoy it perfectly forever with God in eternity. The door to this kind of rest comes through the empty tomb. Jesus rose from the dead to give us eternal life. We have it. We have it now although we have it imperfectly. We speak of living in the church militant and those who have died and went to heaven as the church triumphant.

The church militant—picture us at war. We are at war with the devil, the world and our flesh that is around us. We are at war trying to stand up for what God says is right and too often we find ourselves caving in to the pressures of society around us and changing our view of what really is right or wrong instead of just listening to God's word. Too often you and I find ourselves losing the battle even though the war has been won. We lose the battle. We give in to the influence of sin. We find other things to do besides get to know our God more and better. At times when we do find ourselves sticking up for what is right, we begin to feel worn down and weary because those around us look at us as though we are out of touch and crazy and that we don't understand what the world is all about and that it's a new century, a new millennium.

As you and I face our own failings and as we face the attacks of people around us who think we don't understand what the world is about in this day and age, Easter promises

you and I relief—relief from the fact that we have failed God. God comes to us and says in his Easter Gospel, “I forgive you for being confused by your Godless society. I forgive you for not hearing my word because you were listening to other things around you. I forgive you for your weakness in sin and hopelessness.” God comes to us and gives us that rest here and now so that we begin to enjoy eternal life now because our sins are forgiven—but that perfect rest will come when God calls us out of this world.

Until that day, we remain the church militant and we fight to share this message. Those people that don't live with the confidence that God loves them, that try to face all of the battles of this life on their own—they are out there. And they are struggling even more mightily than we are because we have God at our side. But you and I are the ones that can share Christ with them. You and I are the ones that can point them to the empty tomb so that they can find the rest from all of these worries and anxieties that God wants them to have. You and I are the voice of God. So learn his word to speak it faithfully.

Do you need to get away?—yeah, not just because I'm talking. You need to get away from sin and its worries. Easter gives that to you. Live in that newness of life every day of your life. You have it because Jesus rose from the dead.