



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

July 16, 2023

Pastor Randy Ott

7th Sunday of Pentecost

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Joshua 23:1-11](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 145 CW

Second Lesson: [Hebrews 4:1-11](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 11:25-30](#)

The Christian Finds Rest in God

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

I'm hitting that stretch of the year where I have a whole bunch of doctors' appointments piled on top of each other. I just got the follow up of the surgeon scheduled (coming up in a couple of weeks), a CT scan, and I had a blood draw for that visit on Tuesday. When I got home, I got the results. Of course they mean nothing to me except I see a bunch of yellow that says "High." Being the kind of person that would worry non-stop about stupid stuff he knows nothing about, I resolved to figure out what some of this meant. I knew enough not to go on the internet. I knew enough to go to a greater resource than the internet. I called my wife and said "Here are the ones that say 'High.' Here is what it says underneath" and all this kind of stuff. I said "I want you to tell me about it so I don't just sit here all day and worry about it." She said "Well, what do the previous results say?" And there was this cool little button. You just click on it and it shows you about the last six blood tests you've had. It's about the same as it was before and the doctor wasn't concerned before. Since the surgery those three areas are different but he wasn't concerned before and it hasn't gone out of whack greatly, so it should be alright. So things were back to normal.

But that was the kind of thing, because I'm a worrier and I'm just sitting there the rest of the day by myself (or doing something by myself), that would just eat at me every time there was a spare moment. That's the kind of thing that would gnaw at me. It wouldn't allow me to really have rest. It would trouble me. It would make me worry. That's just my nature. It's foolish, but it's what would happen. So I go to someplace and find out something and then I can get some of those questions answered.

I suppose that's really good advice for us when it comes to the rest we're going to talk about. As Christians, even though we know that Jesus said ***"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,"*** "I will give you rest for your souls," we know that He has done all the work, that He alone has paid for every last one of our sins and we don't do anything. We know that we still are going to have a lot of restless days on this side of heaven because there are all kinds of challenges.

So what are we going to do when those challenges come to this rest? Some of that is what we want to think about today. But we also want to focus again on what kind of rest God is talking about that we are supposed to have, that we find in Jesus and in Jesus alone.

It's interesting when you look in the [Book of Joshua](#). In [Chapter 1](#) it starts out talking about how Moses said "The Lord will give you rest from all your enemies." Now in Joshua's farewell ([the next to the last chapter of the book](#)), he comes back to the same thing and says "The Lord HAS given you rest." What is this rest? What is implied in these passages in the Old Testament is the enemies have been defeated, or living at peace with your neighbors, no threat from neighboring countries; that you can live in peace and safety because there are no immediate threats. Think about the Israelites. That wasn't something they had for quite a long time—450 years as slaves in Egypt, being pursued by Pharaoh's army, fighting all those enemies as they were going to the Promised Land, then under Joshua, conquering the Promised Land. And even in his farewell address he says, "You are going to go live in the land and the Lord will drive out the rest of your enemies," because there were still some in the land. They hadn't completely driven them out. He said, "But make sure that the God who has given you rest, the God who has loved you and done all these things for you and delivered you from your enemies and given you this rest because He has loved you and showed this compassion to you first, make sure you love Him. Hold tight to the [Book of the Law of Moses](#)." That would be the first five books of the Bible. The inspired Scriptures they had at that time. That's what they were to "hold fast" to.

In the [verses after what I read to you](#), he really lays it out clearly to them. "If you don't keep this covenant, if you do turn to other gods and bow down to them and worship them, if you call on them and swear by them," which they often did, "you won't enjoy rest. You will lose this rest from your enemies because your enemies will come and conquer you and you won't have peace and safety and security." And that's exactly what happened. No matter how much Joshua had urged them and how faithful they had been during the time of Joshua, when the time of Judges came, it all fell apart because they took their eyes off God and what God had said. Their relationship with God was conditional. He said "I will give you this rest if you obey my commands." They didn't, so they lost that rest.

In the New Testament, we see how the writers take this and say "Those people lost the rest that God gave to them. Jesus has given you a greater rest. He has given you deliverance, peace and safety from the one who would accuse you of not being able to go to heaven—the devil, the accuser. He can no longer say to you, 'You can't enter into God's eternal rest in heaven,' because Jesus lived and died in your place." But they are also very careful to say "Just because God has done that for you and for every last person in the world, and just because you have faith in that now, stand firm so that you don't lose it, because it can be lost."

About the time that Joshua was saying this to the people, he was just under 110. I'm not ever going to see 110. I don't want to see 110. I want to go to heaven. But think of our timeframe on this earth. It's not that long. The devil, for thousands and thousands and thousands of years has been pretty good at taking our eyes off of the rest God won for us, whether it was the Israelites in the Promised Land, or whether it's those who believe that Jesus lived and died for their sin. The devil still comes and wants to separate us from that rest. So be very careful to focus on God's Word and His promises and His love and His compassion for you so that you don't lose that.

There are a lot of things that can come and tear that rest out of our hearts. Some of them are major and mega and everyone can see them. But some of them are just little and subtle little things that get under your skin, like a little sliver that gets under your fingernail. That's really annoying if you can't get it out. It's annoying every time you bump it. The devil can do that for us today when it comes to Jesus' rest. He can get us to take it for granted. He can get us to think there are other things that we need to be doing and there are other things that are more important right now than to focus on whom God is and what He has done for us. That can lead us away from His rest so gradually that we hardly notice it until we stop and think and it becomes obvious that Jesus isn't a priority in our lives anymore.

It can be the big things. It can be the great troubles, worries and anxieties. What I have found over the years is that everyone thinks everyone else's life is perfect and they don't have struggles or worries. I'm telling you, we are all broken. We all have struggles. We all have worries. We all have difficulty. There are all kinds of things that the devil is waiting to use to say "See, that God who says He loves you, He doesn't love you so much. He let this into your life. He let that into your life." I've seen way too much about the devil wanting to turn people away from God because of what they can see and what they can feel.

I'll tell you this—my emotions and my sight are not as reliable as God's Word, and neither is yours. When we have those questions and those doubts, when there are the things that are trying to separate us from God's rest in Christ (and they will come), we need to turn away from our emotions and what we are focused on and focus back on God and see the love He has for us; how He lived and died for us. This has got to be the

rock-solid certainty that we don't just take for granted but it's what we fall back on every time our feet start to slip.

Personally, the last few years have been tough. The last few years have been a struggle, and wondering and challenging every decision I've made, and thinking, "Is it the right thing?" I think about how often in my life I struggle with, "Did I do the right thing? Did I handle that the right way?" When talking to someone in counseling, or, ain't none of you as hard on my sermons as I am on my sermons, thinking "That sermon barked like a dog. You all should be handing me dog biscuits instead of shaking my hand." And in those times, the greatest blessing to me is to go back and not question "Does God love me?" but to know "Yeah, my sermon stunk today and it's not as good as it should have been, but Christ died for that, and He still loves me. Yeah, I'm not sure what I should have done there and I'm not sure I said the right thing to those people in counseling, but I know for certain my Savior still loves me." I need to remind myself of that and not just take it for granted. "Oh, you're a pastor. You should know that. You don't have to say that out loud to yourself." Oh bull! Each and every one of us here has to say that to ourselves over and over and over, because the rest we have for our soul is the love that our God has for us.

We may wonder and question all kinds of things, but that's one thing you and I can never question. There is just too much proof there. A God who left heaven was willing to live in our place and die in our place. A God who loves us so much, He sent the Spirit into our hearts. A God that loves us so much, He put us together in this family of believers so that we can be a blessing to one another. That God isn't going to desert us. But we need each other to point us back to Him. We need to lead ourselves into the still, quiet waters of the promises God has made to us in Scripture. I guarantee you that it won't take all your problems away. It's just not going to happen. But I guarantee you that God will get you through it. God will bring you safely through all of the rushing waters of what we call life until He brings us safely to the perfect rest, that Sabbath rest that He has waiting for us of an eternity with Him in heaven.

Until then, there are going to be things that aren't real restful. There are going to be sleepless nights. There is going to be anxiety. There is going to be worry. But there should never be a doubt that your God loves you. When you start to doubt that, go back to His Word and see again the evidence of the depth of His love. It was a depth of love that allowed nails, spears and thorns to pierce His body. It was the depth of love that allowed God to forsake God, because God loves you. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.