

Sermon: Drawn In: Living the Creative Life with God. Step 4: Rest in Grace: God's Got This by Pastor Jenn

Scripture Lesson: Hebrews 4:1-11

The passage you heard is a challenging one for me on various levels. On one hand it's one of those Scriptures you have to read a few times to let it sink in. I studied it throughout the week with my commentaries and I'm still not sure I truly understand it, but that's the living word of God, am I right? The other challenge for me was this, as everything started to unfold in the Ukraine, I knew my original *message would not be* appropriate. I was taught in seminary that the best sermons to share with a church were inspired by a newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other. And while times may change as my news comes to me with the simple command "Alexa, share with me the daily news", the impact remains the same. How do we hear God's response to what is going on in the world, good, bad, or indifferent? So let's look at this passage together, and see how God may be leading us to learn it's wisdom to receive rest, in the midst of the chaos of the world.

Here is the background: Scholars are unsure of the author. Some claim Paul, others Barnabas, honestly, no one is certain. And as for the date of its writing, again, scholars are unsure although a guess would be the third century of the Common Era, with some assumptions of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament being made available and known. While scholars are unsure of the exact setting, the writing seems to reflect conditions of being a church in the city of Rome.

What can be known about this text is that the readers are second generation Christians. In Hebrews 2:3-4 we read, "It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, ⁴ while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will." So they are not the apostles, but they learned from the apostles or at least their teachings.

The author also makes it known that they are not a new congregation, in 5:12 it is written, "¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God." This points to the revelation that the faith community is in crisis. Some have grown lax in attendance, or as it says in 10:25 neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, some were imprisoned, some lost their property, others were publicly ridiculed and abused, which you can read in the rest of chapter 10.

And yet, faith is the core of this letter. You may recall it is this book that we read the stirring words 11: 1 "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

So that's the background, Christians facing society's challenges and pressures to abandon their faith. *Something our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Ukraine are facing, correct?*

And so begins today's passage with these words, "4 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest is still open, let us take care that none of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For indeed the good news came to us just as to them; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." The author uses the word *rest* here. And this refers to what was shared at the beginning of our worship services, in Genesis 2, "² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation."

God took a pause. That doesn't mean God was done, the rest of the Old Testament will prove that God did not stop creating and forming, but God did rest.

Further we know that God commanded the Israelites to take a day of rest too. Exodus 20:8–11 “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.” The Sabbath day is consecrated, meaning holy, dedicated to a higher purpose. This day of rest is commanded by God, so we can rededicate ourselves to God's higher purpose.

But Chapter 4 continues, telling the disappointment God had in the Israelites saved from Egyptian captivity, unwilling to trust and rest in God, “⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later about another day.” The disappointment for God was not only did the wandering Israelites not trust in God, but they looked to Moses and Joshua to guide them, and lead them to rest, but they did not, *they could not*. And the reason they could not is because *to rest in this text is not about taking a nap*, but to be assured of salvation. You see, To rest with God is to know of God's saving presence now and forever. God's offer of rest was not received by Israel, because they never trusted God, *they never trusted themselves to rest for fear that if they did, how could they be secure?* They could, if they believed God was resting with them. Which the author writes, “⁹ So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; ¹⁰ for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs.”

Friends this comes back to the idea of do we earn our salvation or is it a given? Are we saved by works or by faith? To know, trust, and believe we are saved by faith, gives way to rest. Rest from our fears because God's got this, God's got us through the grace of Jesus Christ. In fact the author of Hebrews concludes this chapter with these words, “¹⁴ Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” In Jesus, God has put our sins, our mistakes, our faults, out of God's mind. So we must release ourselves from that guilt and rest with God's grace, in order to move forward as God's people, to redeem the world. *We cannot hold onto our mistakes, for by doing so we deny the peace that surpasses all understanding, the peace of God's love in Jesus Christ.*

If you have access to Facebook, Raising Hope, the mission of our friends in Ukraine are doing just that and inviting people from all over the Ukraine to do the same. On Thursday, Feb 24th, Archie posted, “By now I am sure you have all heard that Ukraine is under attack we were in Vinnytsa when we saw five rockets fly right above us. We are safe and headed to Nemiya, where Ruslan is. God is so much bigger than all that is happening so we believe in His sovereign power !!!” Later that same day she posted, “As I, Archie, work through prepping, staying calm and praying, I looked across the table and saw this necklace.” (It quotes the Scripture, “Fear not, for I am with you”) She goes on to say, “It's one of the necklaces we gave all the kids this year and Christmas presents. So they would always remember God's word. Very fitting as we work through anxiety, fear and understanding what this all means. He is with us. He is.” And that

evening she wrote, “It’s 8pm here. We gathered for 3 hours at church, praying, singing and continues to a worship our God Almighty! It’s the only way we know to stay calm and at peace.” *They invited the people to rest in worship, and they came.*

Yesterday Archie posted, “9:35am - we had a quiet night here, some threats of rockets throughout our region and sirens and announcements of intercepted rockets, but nothing like Kyiv, may the Lord have mercy, our Ukrainian people are fierce and still holding them back. Continue praying for Kyiv and surrounding areas. We have many friends still there serving and helping as needed. We are thankful to be safe and headed out for the day. Loading wood to heat the crisis center, made muffins for the those fleeing, army personnel and block post police. And will work to set up beds in the center and our church. Thank you again for your prayers and continued support. We were able to get more food and supplies yesterday. Today, we will get sheets and towels and other needed supplies.”

Then last night, the post read, “Today was calm in our city, unlike other places. We continue to trust God for miracles every minute. In the meanwhile, we help... Thank you to a local business man who has a cake factory for donating cakes that we had the privilege to give out, such a refreshing few minutes with lots of smiles in the midst of such sadness. We also, have over 20 people in the crisis center resting for the night and a enjoyed a hot meal. We are so grateful for all those who are helping make this happen for us here during this time. Prayers for the Ukrainian men and women fighting for their nation!”

Did you hear the invitation for rest throughout those writings? The church is offering rest to the weary scared souls, with food, shelter, and worship. May we do the same.

As we wrap up this sermon series of being Drawn In, today’s invitation is to be drawn into God’s heart to rest. Not to risk or listen as we spoke about the weeks prior, but rest, rest with God, and the assurance of God’s redeeming love.

And as for now, one way we will rest in that love is to celebrate the Great Thanksgiving, a means of God’s grace for all. Today’s sacrament will include a very special element. On the table you will see a beautiful silver chalice. That was made by one of our own, Rev. Phil Jurus, retired Lutheran pastor whom we are blessed to have with us. Phil was commissioned by his home church, Christ Lutheran Church in Hazleton, to create the chalice and on the panels of the stem contain symbols of Baptism and the Holy Spirit. Two panels show a cross with tongues of flames and three drops of water into open hands, which Phil says illustrates “the forgiveness given freely to the baptized person through the cross and the Holy Spirit”. The other two panels symbolized the Holy Spirit with “semi-precious gems selected because their color closely approaches that of fame.” As Phil was drawn into God’s creativity with this chalice, we are invited to gaze upon it and *rest in what it shares, what it offers us this day, rest in the beauty of God’s grace.*

Let’s pray: God of all creation, open our hearts so that we are able to admit to you the fullness of our lives – that which is beautiful and good, and that which is hurtful and hateful. We confess that we do not follow your will in all that we do. We do not notice the Spirit’s guidance. We hold back from taking risks with your love. We do not listen for the cries of those around us and respond. And we do not rest in your grace and salvation. Forgive us, we pray, and empower us to be imitators of Christ just as your church in Ukraine is doing, by drawing closer to your merciful heart, full of grace. In your name we pray, Amen.