

Psalm 95:7-11 and Hebrews 4:1-13  
“A Sabbath Rest”

I have to begin today by thanking you as parents and families of the preschool children for trusting us in caring for your child. As a father of three daughters I know what it means to have to trust other people to spend time with your children. My youngest daughter is a preschool drop out, she went one day and then refused to go again, and my wife was happy to have her home until kindergarten, but my other two daughters happily attended the preschool that we started at a church where I served in Florida.

But when you look at the sermon title for today, a Sabbath rest, I'm guessing that all of you who are raising kids are saying yes, give me some insight on how I can slow down this pace of life in which I currently find myself. Your age group is that group of people in the United States who is the most sleep deprived. I can't quote any study, but having lived it and experienced it, I know. But you know what else is true, we choose to live that way. We choose to live a life where every second of our day is filled with activities and events. We make choices about our families and how to raise them. Today I want to give you a choice on how to live and how to raise your family that I hope is life changing.

A little background, my wife and I started our ministry when we first got married as missionaries in Italy, the Naples region and we were pastors to four churches and helped oversee an orphanage. At this orphanage we had a school with about 300 children and every day we had chapel at this school. Two of our daughters were born in Naples, where it was a common birthing area and for my oldest no one else was giving birth so I was allowed in, for my second it was a full moon, so no, I was not going to be in that room.

We moved to Florida to be close to my father and our youngest, Bethany, was born in a luxury suite, at least it seemed like it, in a hospital room that was all ours as the British Open was taking place. As time goes on in our families we make choices that not only impact our marriages, but they also impact our children, but they are choices. We chose to move to Russia when our youngest was going into 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and the middle child 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the oldest into 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It was a choice made for the purpose of exposing our children to another culture, another way of life, and also a choice made from a specific calling from the Lord to be missionaries and pastors there.

Throughout our lives we make choices that tell stories to our children about our priorities and how important they are to us and how important God is to us as well. In preschool we learn

the 10 commandments and the fourth one is Obey the Sabbath, and we teach the children that the Sabbath is a day when the whole family is able to thank God by going to church. Now, there is so much more to it than that, so sorry, but not sorry. What do we do as a family to provide a time where we are showing our children our priorities and what is important to us in regards to our faith? Sleeping in on a Sunday morning is not a Sabbath rest, that's just sleep. How do we pass on to the next generation the importance of passing down the faith from one generation to the next, as we show them how to in a healthy way rest together, grow together, and be together.

Both of our Scriptures today talk about a Sabbath rest and a way of life that is our choice to make, no one forces us to choose how we live our lives or how we raise our children. I hope you get a clear picture on what it looks like to live a way of life that leads to peace in the midst of a hectic time of your life. A way of life centered on Christ and Christ alone is our choice, our Scriptures encourage it, but the way our culture is right now, Jesus demands it. Let's read.

## **READ**

You can hear in Psalm 95 the real concern that the author has for his people. He is our God, and we are the sheep of his pasture. Everything else that follows has to be seen from that perspective. There is real pastoral concern from the author, because he knows the past of his people, and he speaks about how they chose to disobey as they left Egypt and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years seeing the presence of God first hand but still choosing to disobey. He says in vs.7 today, today, you have a choice to listen to the voice of God. We read that also in Hebrews, we'll see that later. Nothing happens by chance. You are here because you chose to be here, but God is also working behind the scenes doing a million other things that you don't know that will contribute to you being here today.

But we read that the people of God chose, it was their decision, not to obey God, to move away, purposefully, from God's presence. We read more and he says that there are repercussions to disobedience. Our youngest daughter, Bethany, whenever she was punished and sent to her room she knew that she had to stay in her room. But her room we built out of this massive living room and so it did not have a door. So she would put one foot in her room and the whole rest of her body would be out in the living room with everyone else, so that she would be obeying.

There are repercussions to disobedience that often go far beyond just staying in your room. But we think we know what is best for us, and we listen to the voices that have no

connection to God to guide us into our future. The author of Hebrews has the same pastoral concerns for his community that the psalmist has in 95. We read in vs. 1 that he cares for every single one of the people of the church and he doesn't want a person to fail to reach the rest that is promised. We see a similar thing in vs.11 where he says that he doesn't want on person from the church to fall into the temptation to disobey.

The author of Hebrews loves his church, loves his community and he cares for them as a pastor cares for his sheep. But he says in vs.11 that it takes effort to enter that rest that God has chosen for us. The choices we make are not easy. Our goal here at First Presbyterian is that every single person who enters these doors would come to know Jesus. And that every single person who already knows Jesus would spend time with us and find themselves more mature in their faith as a result.

We want people to see Jesus through the work of this church, through our preschool, through our foodbank that had a 36% increase in clients last year. Through our Community Impact Committee that gives out financial assistance to the community, through our youth group and its mission trips, through our work with Water Street, and Christ home, and the meals that we serve on the fifth Sunday, and the opening of our campus to Our Table every Friday night for meals as well. We have made a conscious decision here at First Presbyterian that Jesus will be shown by what we do, and not just by what we say.

The way that Israel failed as we saw in Psalm 95 is the same looming problem for any congregation, for any group of people who call themselves disciples. We can make choices that make us lose sight of the fact that we are all part of the story of God's people. We can make choices that come from a place where we think we are doing this on our own and by ourselves. But that couldn't be further from the truth. When we only focus on the present, and the stress and the anxiety and the lack of time and energy in our present, then we lose sight of the future that God has for us. God tells us that he has plans for us, those plans are found in Jeremiah 29:11 where we read that God's plans for us are for our welfare and not for harm, to give us a future with hope.

I was listening to NPR the other day and there was a story about a man who was in a car accident and had lost his legs. The story was told by his neighbor who was miserable and always unhappy. She would every day look out at him in his wheelchair struggling in trying to plant a garden, or get his garbage cans in, but he was always smiling, and whistling or singing. It was

clear that he was happy, even in the midst of what anyone would term a terrible situation. So she went out and asked him, how is it that you are so happy in the midst of this tragedy. He said, you know, after the accident I told myself I'm going to be happy. I chose to be happy. She left in tears because she realized that she had made a different choice in her life.

We cannot choose what happens to us all the time, but we can choose to live with Christ which will provide us with a way of life that is one of rest from the beginning to the end. The people of God we read previously have chosen to disobey God, and that did not work out well for them. I understand the pressures. My daughters all played at least two, some three varsity sports, two of them went on to play in college, so I know the pressures. As parents we feel that at any moment we can fall behind and then our kids will be at a disadvantage for life.

I hate to break it to you, but it isn't up to you. We think that it is, we build up this pressure thinking that it is, but you have a choice to make, and that choice is not whether your kid is going to be a professional athlete or not. That is not up to you. It is whether you will surround them in a household of faith that has a confident expectation for the future. A household that has a present grasp on the future reality. What you do find is that most families only have the incessant anxiety on their minds and so lose sight of what is really important in the future.

So what does a life of Sabbath rest look like, which I am encouraging all of us to follow? There is no formula or prescriptive ways in which to make it happen. But it all begins with a recognition that Jesus is the one who calls you away from following what the world wants and calls you to a life of peace. In John 14:27 he states that he gives us a peace that the world cannot give. What would peace in your life look like right now? I don't mean just a really good nap, but that might be part of it, right, a guilt free nap?

In Revelation 7:17 we see a glimpse of what that peace looks like, what the Sabbath rest looks like on a daily basis. "he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." This is what you can exchange for what you currently have when we have a relationship with Jesus that is more than a belief, but rather a way of life. It is our choice to be aligned with Christ or not. When we are, then we have a peaceful and restful disposition and we give up any false pretense that we are somehow the masters of our future or our life.

We read that Jesus is the testimony, is the Word that has acted so that today we can enter into relationship, into partnership, even into rest with him. Jesus makes it possible today. We read in Hebrews that it is not too late. We still have time, but we need to make a decision today. The invitation to rest has not been revoked, it still holds true. The decision to align with Jesus, to have a deep life long relationship with him is faced by each generation. It isn't something that your children can be born into.

Jesus is able to transform frightened people who hide in the garden and make excuses into holy partners of Jesus Christ who can, through him, stand up boldly and render account. Amen.