

Joshua 23:1-11. After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then old and well advanced in years, ² summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and said to them: “I am old and well advanced in years. ³ You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. ⁴ Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you. ⁶ “Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. ⁷ Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. ⁸ But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now. ⁹ “The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. ¹⁰ One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. ¹¹ So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

Hold close to the one who gives you rest.

- 1. We are refreshed through quiet reflection upon our God.**
- 2. We are renewed through his future promises.**

Here we are at the start of another new week. How was the weekend? Was it good? Was it busy, or were able to sit and relax and do something that you enjoy? Sunday is now here, and for many in our culture, Sunday serves as a day of rest and refreshment. Some business remain open, there are plenty of people who have to work on Sunday, but for most, Sunday is a day that is protected, set aside, and guarded, for this very purpose of rest. For many people Sunday is their day to take some time off, cut back on their usual workload, and recharge their batteries – so to speak. Sunday has become a day that can serve for many as a rather quiet day of transition from one week to another. Recalling the events of the previous week, we often take this day to recharge and prepare ourselves for the coming week. This can be a very useful practice that renews us to take on the challenges in the week ahead.

For the Christian, even though we appreciate a day of physical rest and we enjoy the week up at the lake and other time enjoying leisure and rest, as Christians we recognize how much more important it is to take time for spiritual rest. This is why we come together for worship. Week after week, on this day that has been set apart, we are refreshed not only by a degree of physical rest, but we are refreshed by quiet reflection

and we are renewed by jubilant praise. That is a big part of why we are here. We come here together, to gather around God's Word to receive rest and refreshment.

We are refreshed by the amazing grace of our God. We confess our sins and we are reminded of his forgiveness and the weight and burden of guilt is once again lifted from our shoulders and we find rest. The Lord almighty has done this for us and we praise him. We hold close to him who gives us rest.

Week after week we hear this rest is offered to us in our lessons from Scripture and proclaimed through hymns and prayers: we are given peace and comfort as we consider the many aspects of our God's love and care. The Lord almighty in his love and care sent his Son to set us free from sin and death. The Lord almighty, who took on flesh and died for us, rose again to take away the sting of death. Our loving God provides for our daily needs. Our gracious Father calms our anxious hearts with his presence. Our powerful Lord encourages us that he has the power to make even bad things work out for our good or serve as loving discipline. We find comfort and rest when we reflect on the goodness and power of the almighty. And then in his goodness our loving God goes even further to make sure that we are able to live in peace as he promises to give us the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

And so we come to worship our God and many times we come weak and weary. We are burdened by guilt, worn down by sin, beat up or at least made tired by a rough or hectic week gone by and we come looking for rest. And for some of us it is not just the week gone by that troubles us, that weighs on us, but we are anxious and exhausted by what may cross our path in the week to come. And so in this place of worship and through his Word and sacraments we are graciously given what we seek, what we need, rest. We find rest and relief when we are reminded of God's goodness. We find rest in Christ Jesus and then we are renewed in our service to God.

At our Savior's gracious invitation we come and we take the troubles of the previous week, the perils of the previous days, and we dump them before our God in prayer. As a deep cleansing breath brings clarity and relief in anxious situation, so we are put at ease when we take this cleansing breath in worship. We breathe out those things that trouble us. We confess our sins, we speak our silent prayers bringing to our God our troubles, and casting them at his feet. And as we do this we also reflect on the goodness of our God. We breathe in his kindness and his grace, we take in his patience and his love, and this soothes our hearts and minds. We find rest for our souls, finding peace and solace and serenity especially in the fact that Jesus has defeated our enemies of sin death and the devil. And this rest, this peace, which we have through faith, is a foretaste of the heavenly rest that God will give us. This relief, this rest that we enjoy through faith now is a small sampling of what we will enjoy forever and always in heaven. What joy! Let us praise our God! Let us be renewed to hold close to him who gives us rest.

Centuries ago, a God-fearing general named Joshua recognized the peace and rest that God had given to him and to his people. Joshua was the man that God had chosen to lead his people into the Promised Land. Joshua had won many victories for the Lord from the Jordan River to the Great Mediterranean Sea. Finally after years and years of battle

and conflict, Joshua and the people of Israel enjoyed a lengthy period of rest from their enemies.

Joshua was now well advanced in years and so he saw this rest that his people enjoyed and he saw it as a foretaste of the eternal rest in heaven that he would soon enjoy. So in these verses, ready for his rest, he says farewell to the people of God, but not without giving them the encouragement that they needed. He urged them to hold close to the one who gives them peace and security, victory and rest. Our lesson tells us, ***After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua... said to them: "I am old and well advanced in years. ³ You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you."*** Encouraging them to reflect on the many wonderful things that God had done for them in the past, Joshua then turned their attention toward their hope for the future. ***⁴ Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. ⁵ The LORD your God himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.*** They could rest secure in the most capable hands of God. God had done much for them. He had given them victory after victory and their mighty God would continue to fulfill his promise to them. God would continue to be with them, and he would give them full possession of the land just as he had promised.

They were enjoying a time of rest from their enemies, but their faithful leader would soon be gone and there were still battles to be fought. Certainly this would be a time of transition. It would also be time of anxiety and worry as Joshua would no longer be the leader of God's people. Would they have the same success and rest? And so Joshua, sensing that his eternal rest was near, sought to put the hearts of God's people at ease. He reminded them that it was the Lord who had done such great things for his people. Sure, for a time Joshua was a part of that, but it was God would continue to bring them blessings. The LORD would drive the remaining peoples out of the land. Refreshed by this reflection on what their God had done, God's people would also be renewed to serve him through these future promises. As he had delivered them and cared for them in the past so the Lord would take care of them in the future. In this time of transition for the people of God Joshua spoke words that urge God's people to remain faithful, to hold fast to the one who gives them rest.

The word translated 'hold fast' comes from the same word that expresses the union between a man and a wife in marriage. God had claimed his people as his bride and held safely in the security of his faithful love God would provide renew and rest so that they could be reenergized to continue in their faithfulness Him. So Joshua urged the people to hold fast or cleave to their God. They were to hold fast to God and follow his will. They were to find refuge and rest in their God so that they would be equipped to resist the influence of their unbelieving neighbors. Instead they were to gladly serve the Lord and give their devotion and obedience to the LORD. And Joshua gave an important reminder how all this would be possible, it would be through quiet reflection upon what God had

done for them and the careful consideration of the hope he gave them for the future. This restful observance of God's goodness would be so vital to this continuing connection to their Lord and God.

That continues to be the truth today. As the troubles of life and the influences of this world weigh on us we are refreshed by the faithfulness of our God and we are renewed to hold fast to God. He is the one who has given me victory over my enemies of sin, death, and the devil and he will faithfully bring us through the challenges of this life. Refreshed by a reflection upon what he has done, we are renewed to serve him. We gladly hold fast to our Lord and we are careful to listen to his Word and follow his commands.

A young man troubled by the cycle of sin and temptation and guilt finds rest in the forgiveness of Jesus and the promise of eternal life. Refreshed by the undeserved love of God the young man is renewed in his service to God. Sleepless nights, unable to rest because he is wracked with guilt, up battling temptation and losing, his nights are now far more peaceful because of the rest that he has in Jesus. Resisting temptation is a task that is difficult, but it is a task made easier when he considers the peace and the joy that he has in his faithful Lord. The woman racked with anxiety because of the hectic week that lies ahead find rest in her God who strengthens her. Reflecting on the fact that God has been with her and her faith has held her up in days and weeks and months gone by, her anxious heart is given rest and she trusts that God will take care of her. The middle aged couple whose lives have just been so terribly shaken because the husband has been recently diagnosed with a debilitating disease finds rest and peace in their faithful God. He promises to be with his people. He promises to guide us through this restless life to the eternal home of heaven. Reflecting on the goodness of God, this Christian couple is renewed in their ability to say, "Your will be done." And finally, the Christian who knows that death is near faces this final foe unafraid because of the calming assurance of victory that our mighty Lord has given us through Christ Jesus. That Christian knows of the blessed eternal rest that waits for those who die in the Lord.

Whenever you are troubled this coming week, whenever anxieties pop up, whenever guilt or trouble or attacks, know that you have rest in Jesus. Reflect upon the faithful power and might of your loving God, daily find peace and rest his saving word; and God-willing, rejoice again in this weekly opportunity to be renewed and refreshed as we join together in worship next week.

We have a rest in Jesus that deepens our relationship with God, refreshed by his grace we are renewed in our service to him. As we take time to reflect daily on the goodness of God and as come together weekly to worship and praise God for his amazing grace we are refreshed and renewed to hold fast to our God and gladly take up the task of following him. As Joshua encouraged the Israelites, so I encourage you, ***It was the Lord your God who fought for you.*** It was the Lord your God who died to take away your sin, who rose to give you the sure promise of eternal life. Refreshed and renewed each day and each week by this good news hold fast to your faithful God; find rest in Christ Jesus; and be careful to love the LORD your God who displays his love for you in so many ways, day after day. Amen.