

Are we there yet part 4 – Rest

Big Idea: To encourage believers to take up God's offer of spiritual rest, in order that we may be equipped to continue to boldly journey on this epic road trip we call the life of Faith.

As you well know over the last 3 weeks we have been going on this Journey called 'are we there yet?' We have been looking at the book of Hebrews and the characters of Faith that the author lists in Hebrews 11, in an attempt to encourage Christians that were facing intense persecution, serious stuff. The Christians at this time were being essentially hunted, as I've said in previous weeks some would have been disowned by their family members just because they were proclaiming the name of Jesus, In more extreme cases Christian Believers would have been decapitated, crucified even fed to lions. I reckon some of these believers would have been wondering, when are we going to get to the good part? I thought life was meant be great once I became a believer, but now I'm at risk of losing the ones I love... or in other words are we there yet? So far we have looked at three characters of faith, namely Able and how we are to faithfully gave our best, and listen to the warnings of God. Then, we looked at Abram and Sarai and asked ourselves that all important question, can we surrender our control to our faithful God. And last week, we looked at the beginnings of Moses' faith story and how through faith, we can know and be assured that God can use us to do Great and Mighty things, no matter our shortcomings God makes us worthy. And this week I'm actually going to deviate from the Characters of Hebrews 11 a little bit. You see a few weeks ago I was re-reading Hebrews and noticed Chapter 4, and it's been niggling in my spirit ever since. The author of the Hebrews while writing to this very disheartened group of believers, tells them to rest. Crazy right? Maybe not? Would you join with me as we read Hebrews 4 verses 1 to 13?

God's promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. 2 For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God. 3 for only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said,

"In my anger I took an oath:

'They will never enter my place of rest,'"

Even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. 4 We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: "On the seventh day God rested from all his work." [c] 5 But in the other passage God said, "They will never enter my place of rest." [d]

6 So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. 7 So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted:

“Today when you hear his voice,

Don’t harden your hearts.”

8 Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. 9 So there is a special rest[f] still waiting for the people of God. 10 For all who have entered into God’s rest have rested from their labours, just as God did after creating the world. 11 So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.

12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

There’s a lot in there aye? This morning to aid us in wrapping our head around this passage of text that I believe God wants to use to speak to us this morning. I would like to briefly look at some context of this passage then ask us to look at two questions in light of this passage, what is rest? And how can we obtain this rest?

So Quickly some context, you may have noticed that the author quotes from the end psalm 95 talking about God saying, they will never enter my rest those that don’t believe, those that turn away, you see there is an undertone in this passage of the Israelites in the Exodus. Those same Israelites that Moses who we looked at last week brought out of slavery. You see if we were going through the book of Hebrews as a whole we would have read chapter 3 which is just before 4 funnily enough where the author spends a whole lot of time convincing these Christians with strong Jewish roots that Jesus far is Greater than our faithful friend Moses. And on this long exodus Journey we could call it a summer road trip, (you know they were travelling and camping and there was sand) that took 40 years Because of the Disobedience and unfaithfulness of Gods people, who time after time rejected Gods provision and guidance... anyway during that time God Gave Moses a specific set of commandments (there were 10 of them in fact) these 10 commandments amongst other things were to draw his people toward a better relationship with Him. And one of them was to remember the Sabbath day, the day God rested and therefore we too must rest.

What must have these Hebrew Believers been thinking when they heard, That Gods promise of rest was still available, today in fact. And it’s not just an ordinary rest it’s a special rest, a super natural rest that is on offer. I imagine this news would have been a surprising reminder to these believers who would have been so busy, trying to act out their faith in spite of hardships and persecution that they may have forgotten about the faithful act of resting. And I wonder do we ever when times are tough, work harder and harder, try more and more just to get through and forget about our command to take a break. To slow down, to catch a breath. To have a kit-Kat. Also I think to those Hebrew believers this would have been an exciting revelation. The author describes it as Good News! A kind of relief, Kind of like what I imagine the feeling of coming back from a long road-trip with the family and all the kids fall asleep in the car, that kind of a relief. What an exciting prospect, we can rest in the middle of our trials and tribulations. We can rest on this epic journey we call the life of faith. But what even is this rest, it’s not like we can go to central Otago every 7 days for a wee holiday is it? So what is this special rest that is on offer?

What is rest?

We live in a day and age when busyness is a Dominant driver in our lives I reckon it's actually a status symbol it's something we almost inadvertently strive for, it gives us a sense of worth. So much so that when you ask someone how they are doing? Their first response is no longer a meaningless Good. It's Busy... How are you? Oh well I've been busy this week. And for the most part it's no lie, we have the lawns to do, Bills to pay, Rooms to clean, Work project to finish, T.V. to catch up on, Facebook to check, friends to keep in touch with. Kids to love and appreciate, family to see. And all of that there is the travel, The average person (admittedly this is an American statistic, but I don't think it would be too far off for us) spends 37,935 hours driving a car based on a person that starts driving at 17 and finishes around 78. That means that in an average person's lifetime they will drive roughly 1,284,256 Km, in that distance we could drive to the moon and back more than three times. We truly are busy people. And as a result of the crush and rush of weeks flashing before our eyes, we find ourselves spiritually empty, or spiritually exhausted. You see from this perspective when I think about rest I think about finding a comfy chair, turning on the TV and not moving for a good 4-6 hours. But this isn't the kind of rest that rejuvenates our soul. Our soul longs for something else a rest that goes deeper than skin, muscle and bone.

We know this because the same is true for those who may live lives like my imagined relaxation of verging out doing nothing, those who find fatigue a daily companion. Those who may be out of work, or struggling with poverty, the sick, the lonely and those who only know a life of monotony and boredom. These people too find themselves longing for rest a special rest. These people testify to the fact that deep and meaningful rest cannot be achieved in being doing nothing, in physically resting. Although this may help in some cases.

Two years ago now on Christmas Eve after working hard all year and having regular late nights and working 7 days a week I came down with Glandular fever I have never felt so exhausted in my life, I was overworked, spiritually and physically and I came to a halt. One day before my first summer placement was due to begin. I was forced to rest otherwise I would not be able to complete what God had instore for me. WE NEED REST TO survive.

Similarly with our road trip of faith if we don't take notice of the signs of spiritual fatigue, like this one, or maybe we notice we don't talk to God as much as we used to, by not reading his word like we used to, or we come up against crisis and we try to find satisfaction ourselves by doing what we others outside of faith doing instead of what Christ wants us to do. The author warns us about ignoring these signs as well in verse 7 quoting again for psalm 95 he says "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts." If we ignore these signs then our road trip that is the life of faith may come to an unwanted end. We will be like the Israelites that wandered the dessert for 40 years not receiving the rest God had for them

How do we obtain this spiritual rest?

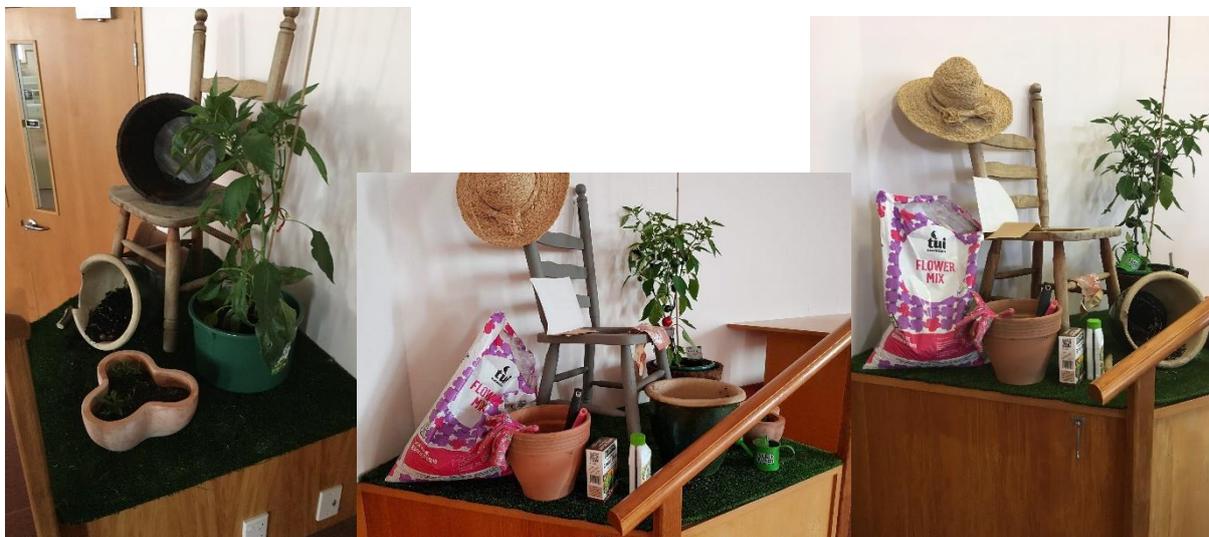
But, how do we obtain this spiritual rest? How do we do our best to enter that rest as the author of Hebrews puts it? Well, remembering that we our passage is written in the context of people familiar with the Mosaic Law and the commandment to keep the Sabbath. We are to keep the Sabbath, The word Sabbath means the seventh day of the week or the day of rest and is a reference to the creation narrative when on the seventh day God rested from his action of creating by taking delight in what he had made. As it says in our passage, in verses 3 and 4

Even though this rest has been ready since he made the world. 4 We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: "On the seventh day God rested from all his work."

But notice on the seventh day God did not turn on Net flicks and vege out on the couch for a day, No on the seventh day He ceased work to marvel at his creation. And in the same way spiritual rest for us is achieved when we stop and marvel at our creator, who we see most clearly in Jesus. You see I think a Sabbath whether it is a Sunday or a Monday, whether it is from lunchtime one day to lunch time the next, whatever it is, is not a passive vegging out, it's an active retiring from the fatigue of life to stand in awe of what God has done. Our do nothing day is actually a do something day. It's our day when we focus on Jesus the one who has given us the ability to enter his divine rest. And we see when we look to Jesus that he is the one who said in Matthew 11:28 ""Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." As he looks at us, and our potentially jaded faith, on this long journey He says come to me. Not "come to a set of teachings (although Jesus calls us to follow his teachings as well), not Come to church (Although Jesus calls us to a community of faith and can be found amongst his gathered people), not come to a vacation (although one may be in order), not come to your psychologist (Although God can and does use gifted councillors) he says first, Come to ME. Jesus is the ultimate source for true rest. One commentator I read said that True rest is found only in a right relationship with the person of God. That being Jesus. Are you tired, Spiritually Jaded? Missing all of the warning signs? How's your relationship with Jesus?

Do you remember the story about me having glandular fever before starting last year's placement? Well I turned up to Ranui Church on Boxing Day told the Associate Pastor who was my supervisor and he responded, "that's not on" and immediately prayed for me and as I brought it to Jesus the effects of it disappeared almost immediately. And it was interesting that as I brought my fatigue to Christ I received rest, physically and spiritually. Now I'm not saying that everyone with glandular fever who prays will be healed. But I'm also not saying that he doesn't heal, as we come to him He can give us rest.

Julian asked me last week, does this journey have and end? It's a good question, and I think there is a destination in mind. You see our road trip of faith, this epic Journey of Faith that we are on is a journey that will ultimately end in Heaven, Where we are fully restored, where we are made fully like Christ. In the meantime while we are here on earth, we are with Gods help striving, journeying towards this fully redeemed and restored state, we are becoming like Christ slowly but surely day by day week by week. A little bit like this beautiful stage display here that Jackie Tetlow has been working on, you may not have noticed but each week it has been,[cycle through photos] getting more and more restored, The old Cracked pot has become new and flourishing with life --- look at photos---



That is what is happening to us on this road trip we call faith, we are slowly but surely becoming more and more like Christ as we look to him, that is why it is so important to regularly take the time to rest in Jesus and admire what he has and is doing.

But the author also gives us another tool to build our relationship with Jesus, he says in the last part of our passage,

12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

We can find Jesus in his word, and when we come to him, we are exposed, restored and renewed.

So let us do our best to enter that rest. Jesus is there waiting for us. I believe anyone of us can receive it as we come to right relationship with God, as we repent and say sorry for all our sins, all of our wrong doings and make a commitment to turn away and try our best to live like Christ did. Jesus is here he is waiting. Kind of like a car that is engine is Idling, the power to turn the wheels and move forward is there its available to you, but you have to push the accelerator. God is making the car move taking you on wild adventures it is God who is doing it, but the car can't move while your foot is on the break, only when you push the accelerator are you letting him in.

Pray....

We're going to spend the next few moments in song, but if you are here and your thinking I need that rest, or I need to get into a right relationship with God. I invite you to come forward and am sure Roly myself and perhaps others would love to pray with you.

Let's sing.

BENEDICTION

The grace of the Word of life rest upon you;
the love of the Source of life embrace you;
and the transforming power of the Breath of life
help, strengthen and surprise you,
this day and all your days. **Amen.**