"Days of the Week" -- Sermon Series for Lent & Easter

"Day 7 -- Rest"
Genesis 2:1-3

Lent 6 Midweek -- March 31, 2004
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

Texts Suggested Hymns (TLH)
Psalm 94:12-23
Genesis 2:1-3
I Peter 3:18-22
John 19:30-42

Suggested Hymns (TLH)
Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted (153)
O Perfect Life of Love (170)
Jesus, Refuge of the Weary (145)

I. Creation Complete

Why isn't He doing anything?

After six amazing days of creation, Day 7 finds…nothing new. No new stars or plants, creatures or people. The Lord isn't doing anything. He's resting.

Why? Let's be clear. He doesn't need the rest. Some will advance the ludicrous notion that the Bible says God had to rest, which either makes the Lord weak or the Bible wrong. But the Lord hasn't gotten tired. For one thing, He's all-powerful. For another, except for Adam and Eve, He's created simply by speaking His Word. It's not that the Lord needs a nap.

So why does He rest? I give you two reasons. First, God rests because He's finished. He's not doing more work because there's no more work to be done. He's finished creating the heavens and the earth, and it is all very good. There is nothing left to add. It's complete. Second, and hopefully it comes as no surprise, He rests for you. He sets the precedent: As God labored, so He gives man labor, too. In that perfect, sinless world, the Lord gives Adam and Eve the task of tending the Garden, of being stewards of creation. But the daily labors will have an end; and when the work is done, there will be rest. And even when man rests, God will still provide. Thus Adam and Eve will rejoice that God cares for them-not because of their work, but because of His love.

It's hard even to imagine, but think of labor in the Garden of Eden. The work that needs to be done will be done, because there's nothing to hinder it-no pest or drought or weed or flood. There's no hurt; so, as the Bible notes, even that different labor of childbirth will have no pain, only joy. With nothing to hinder the work, the work will be most enjoyable. Again, it's hard even to imagine: There is work to be done. Whatever gets done won't suffer the effects of erosion, attrition, entropy or

decay. The work that needs to be done will be done, without setback or shortfall or worry.

Sounds like Paradise to me: There's work to be done, but then it's finished.

There is another, more pertinent, reason why Adam and Eve will enjoy their labors: They have none of the sin that would make the work unpleasant. They suffer from no sloth that would make them waste time, nor selfishness that seeks to pawn off the work on someone else. There is no fear of the task that lies ahead, or resentment for the labor that it takes. There is only contentment, enjoyment and ability, because there is no sin. And because they have no sin, they enjoy God's presence and favor. It is simply the way things are that they are in communion with God.

Therefore, when it comes to having God's favor, there's no work to be done to get it. They don't have to work for God's goodwill, because they already, naturally have it.

But then comes the Fall into sin; and with sin comes fear and death and decay. And all of a sudden, the work gets a whole lot harder. Those beautiful animals created by God must now fight to survive, and they'll happily destroy man's crops for their own preservation. Whatever man labors to build will eventually fall apart. Thorns and thistles will now be found sown all over the ground, complicating labor even more. The joy of birth and new life will bring with it pain and cries and dangers to health of mother and child.

Not only that, but Adam and Eve are no longer righteous, so all of those sins of sloth and selfishness are now in play. Adam and Eve aren't going to want to do the work all the time anymore. They'll be quite happy to have the other do their work for them, and get away with that as much as possible. Sin doesn't want to do work; it wants to be served.

So behold some more consequences of sin. There is still work to be done. Most of it is going to be a pain. It isn't going to go well naturally, and days without setbacks will be few and far between. Adam and Eve aren't going to want to do it. But where they had the privilege and joy of laboring before, now work is a requirement for survival. If they don't work, they won't have food or shelter or clothing. If they don't put in a hard day every day, they're going to die really fast.

That's how it still is today: There's work to be done, and it has to be done. Even if you like your work, you still encounter setbacks and disappointments. You get your team in place, and one of them leaves. You get to step 34, and find out that your mistake at step 3 means you have to go back 31 steps. The belt breaks, the blade goes dull, the hard drive crashes, and the guy in the next cubicle keeps telling you between sneezes that he's coming down with the flu.

Set the setbacks aside, and there's still that problem of sin: You don't always want to do the work. There's the problem of stress and burnout because the problems grind you down. There's the jealousy of other laborers who seem to have it easier, or the resentment toward those who aren't doing their fair share. There's the sloth that makes the snooze button seem a lot more attractive than getting to work on time. Don't forget that all of your coworkers have the same sinful nature, which will only make work more of a challenge.

But you have to work, because it's a matter of survival. If you work, you eat. If you don't, you go hungry. As long as you want to survive, there's work to do; and the work is never done. If you want to keep what you have, keep working. Stop working, and you lose.

The Lord intended you to have something to do, but His will was not that your labor be such a source of trouble. However, it is. All of this serves as a daily, grinding reminder of the sinful state of this world; and all of this therefore is meant to serve as a merciful reminder of a more important truth.

Like it or hate it, you have to work-that's how the fallen world works. If that's not a painful-enough reality, here's some worse news. Thanks to sin, you're not a naturally righteous person who enjoys God's presence and favor; instead, you're a fallen sinner who no longer enjoys such privilege. If you're going to live with God, there's work to be done. Hard work. You have to keep all the commandments. You have love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength; and you have to love your neighbor as yourself. You have to be holy as God is holy and not sin-not ever in the slightest. If you get that work done perfectly-as perfectly as God finished His creation, then you may live in the Lord's presence forever.

That's the Law. Do the work of being perfect to perfection, and you will live.

If you're going to be saved, there's work to be done. And you can't do it.

You may believe that you can for a while, but not forever. There is a great tendency for people to believe that they have done enough in order to be saved; but as death draws near, such conviction crumbles. "The Lord says, 'If you want to enter into life, then keep the commandments' (Mt. 19:17). He declares, 'The soul that sins shall die' (Ezek. 18:4). I am dying, and the work is not done. Can I still be saved?"

If you are relatively healthy and vigorous, it may be easy to answer those questions with confidence. It is different when death is near. When one near death sees the wages of sin doing such damage to his body, he comes to realize the enormity of sin's curse. He realizes that death is coming because he can't keep that Law. He can't do the work that is required to be with God. At such time, the devil delights to accuse us with our failings and failures; for if the only way to heaven is our work of obedience, we are all lost for eternity.

That is why we look at Day 7 for help. There is great comfort that God rests.

II. Redemption Finished

Why isn't He doing anything? In the three years since His baptism in the Jordan, the disciples have seen the Lord laboring to do His Father's will. He's taught and healed, even raised the dead and cast out demons. He's been hard at work loving His neighbor and doing the Father's plan for salvation. But now, they don't see Him doing anything.

Why isn't He doing anything?

The answer seems undeniably obvious enough. He's not doing anything because He's died. Day 6 of Holy Week saw Him cry out "It is finished" and breathe His last. Day 7 finds His body wrapped in cloths and laid in a borrowed grave, a stone rolled in front of an entrance guarded by soldiers. He's not doing anything because He can't do anything because people who have died can't do anything anymore. Right?

Wrong. There is a very good reason why Jesus does nothing for their redemption that day: There is nothing to do. When He uttered "It is finished!" on the cross, He meant that all had been done for your salvation. In His labors throughout His life, He has not once failed to keep the Law and obey His Father in heaven. At the cross, then, He has been the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. He has suffered all of God's judgment for all of that sin. There is no more a price to be paid. That's why He isn't doing anything: All that He had to do is finished.

The Lord finished creation in six days and rested on Day 7. Jesus has finished redemption on Day 6, and now He rests on Day 7.

There is, of course, His descent into hell to preach to the spirits in prison. But this is not labor: This is a proclamation of His victory. To assure you that He has defeated the devil, He marches right into hell without resistance and declares, "I've won, and no one can stop me from saving!" He does this for you, that you might know the devil is beaten. But this descent is not part of the labor of His Humiliation and suffering; this is part of His Exaltation and victory.

It is finished. The work of your redemption is done. There's nothing left to do.

Remember what the Law said? Do the work of being perfect to perfection, and you will live. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself. Be holy. All the things you have to do to live. All the things you can't do and so face eternal death.

Hear this Good News: All the things you have to do to be saved have already been done for you.

All those years from womb to cross, Jesus kept that Law. He loved His Father and served Him with all His heart, soul and strength; and He loved His neighbor as Himself. He didn't sin-He remained holy. He didn't have to die because He hadn't forfeited His life.

But after living the life of obedience you needed to live, He died the death that awaited you because of your sin. He suffered God's judgment for your failed labors, and for all the sins of the world. There's no more price to be paid, because He's paid it all.

That's what He declares when He says, "It is finished." The work for your redemption is done. That's why the Lord rests on Day 7.

Of course, risen again, He continues to work for your salvation. The One who has labored and won your salvation still calls out, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). His yoke is easy because He's already completed the work. His burden of your sin is easy because He bore it to the cross and left it there.

And that is the Christian's confidence, even in the face of death. Where you hear the whispers that "You haven't done enough," you can readily agree. But then you can add, "But Christ has done enough for me. He lived for me and He died for me; and He says that He has done enough for my salvation. I can't do enough, but I don't have to; because He has done it all."

The work is done, finished. That's why the Lord rests on Day 7, after the cross and before the Resurrection. He dies, He sleeps and He rises again. As your Savior, so also you, for by His burial He has sanctified your grave. Unless He first returns, you and I face bodily death. But for the people of God, death is only a sleep, nothing more. After that comes the Resurrection and eternal life.

The work is finished-that's why the Savior rests. And that is why, now and forever, you can rest in peace, because you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen