

The third commandment is: “Remember the Sabbath Day by Keeping it Holy.” Luther explains it this way: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear it and learn it.” We will be starting a three-week sermon series as we examine the first chapters of the Book of Hebrews. In these chapters, the author exhorts the congregation to remember the sabbath day, and to keep the faith that they received when the Holy Spirit first came upon them.

I can relate to this need to keep the faith, and maybe you can, also. At this snapshot in time, we have 175 baptized members and 149 confirmed members plus the vicar and his family, plus college students whose souls their home pastors have entrusted to our care, plus return guests some of whom may be in the process of joining our church. All of them—all of you—are embodied souls that are heading for an eternal destination: heaven or hell. Faith Lutheran Church has entrusted me with the solemn duty of partnering with you to shepherd these souls to heaven. If I’m being vulnerable, that responsibility weighs on me.

Twice in Hebrews chapter 13 the author commends pastoral leaders. In verse 17 we read, **“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”** It is a joy to see everyone here today. It is a joy to see faithful Christians making sacrifices for the faith. The groaning can come with the handwritten notes that never get a reply, the voicemails that never get returned, and when people tell you with a smiling face, “I know that’s what God’s Word teaches, but I’m not going to do it.”

Our text begins, **“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”** The author of the Hebrews wants his hearers to enter the Sabbath Rest of eternal life. He doesn’t want a single one of them to drift away. He goes on to say that angels taught the people of the Old Testament, and God disciplined those who didn’t listen to the angels’ message. How much more can we trust the message of Jesus Christ who is the very Word of God.

The question weaving through this message is how can we enter Sabbath Rest? The answer is that it’s through Jesus’ easy yoke. I will illustrate my point through three different kinds of yokes. The first yoke is that of a pilot’s yoke. Strictly speaking, we might call it the control stick. One little rod can control the entirety of the aircraft.

Now some of you listening might hear my complaints about Sabbath rest, and say, pastor, you don’t understand my life. Sunday is my only day to sleep in. Coach said if I miss a Sunday morning game, I’m off the team. Getting a C in anatomy means my hopes at physical therapy graduate school are a pipe dream—I

need to study. I want to go to church, but I'm too depressed to roll out of bed. Telling me to rest by slowing down to listen to Jesus just means I'll need to scramble even harder the other six days of the week. Sabbath rest is good for retirees and slackers, but not for me and my family who are on 24/7.

3. The yoke of sabbath rest can seem quite daunting. Do you ever feel like your life is like one of those disaster movies where the pilot passes out and you're stuck behind the yoke with a plane full of passengers trying to land the plane? That would be a lot of pressure. That wouldn't be very restful. I could see the perceived need to skip church. But if you feel like that's your life, there's an important person you've barred from the cockpit. He's not going to slam down the door, but he stands at the door and knocks.

The author of Hebrews goes on to speak of the one who stands at the door and knocks. We read in verses 9–10 **“But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.”**

I get it. It's not easy to make it to church. It's not easy to hold God's Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. However, the Son of God left the Sabbath Rest of heaven to be made lower than the angels, living in our mess, living in our chaotic, sin-corrupted world. The Son of God became human in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ became man in the womb of the virgin Mary as a tiny little zygote. His first nutrients were from a yoke sack that gave him the energy to grow. As we welcome parents this weekend at UWL parents' weekend, we too take the time to reflect upon the fact that the grown-up college student was once a microscopic zygote in his or her mother's womb, just as Jesus was.

Now, I had to do some research on this. I had thought the big yellow yoke of the egg was the part that turned into a chicken, but not so. There's a tiny little part that rests on the yoke which when fertilized turns into a chick. The yoke acts as the food source for the chick in the egg. That's why if you want to lose weight, you only eat the egg whites and not the yolk, the yolk that fills the chick fills us, also.

One must think that Jesus' ministry was not very restful. It seemed He didn't have a Sabbath rest, but we forget that the yoke that fed him never departed from him. When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the desert, Jesus resisted him when tempted to turn bread into stones saying, **“It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”** The Lord is in control of all things. He doesn't need food to sustain you. He could, without means, give you all that you need to go about your daily life. On the other

hand, if He were to withdraw His sustaining Word from the bread we eat, it would be worthless and give us no nutrition. All that we have depends on God.

Coming to church on Sunday is a statement of trust. It is a way of saying, “Yeah, going to church might mean I need to give up a sport, but the Lord is more important than my hopes at the professionals or a college scholarship.” “Yeah, I could be studying right now, but my intellect comes from God who is Wisdom itself.” “Yeah, I could be getting paid overtime, but my every cent I own comes from the hand of God who sustains me.” “Yeah, I could be sleeping in today, but I believe David who prayed, **“In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”**” As we see God and His Word as the yoke that sustains and feeds us, as the umbilical cord that gives us our nutrients, we see that the risky thing becomes absenting ourselves from Church. The dangerous thing becomes our pillows between the hours of 8 and 10 on a Sunday. The crazy thing becomes not prioritizing the Lord who feeds us and carries our burden.

Because in the Christian Church, it only takes one egg to make an omelet, as we consider all that Christ has suffered for us when He became human, our gratitude overflows for His service to us. He was crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death for me and for you. He tasted death for you, so that you would not taste eternal death. 2. Jesus' yoke was scrambled to give you rest.

One last yoke. The oxen yoke. A yoke is a piece of wood that binds two oxen together to work together on the farm. Jesus Christ left His sabbath rest to suffer for you so that you never suffer alone. **“For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”** Jesus knows what it’s like to be busy. He knows what it’s like to suffer want. He knows all your troubles, and yet you can trust Him to carry them for you. He entered this Earth to give you rest. He takes the pilot’s yoke and navigates you through your worst days.

“We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear it and learn it.” 1. Jesus carries the yoke of sabbath rest for you.

Suddenly we see it is no burden to make time for prayer and God’s Word. It is the lifeline that gets us from week to week. Yes, it may be hard to make it. Yes, you may not always feel like you get something out of church, but it’s always worth it. He bears our burdens, forgives us where we fall short, and He as our great High priest calls out to those absent, and Shepherds them back to the fold.
BECAUSE HE SUFFERED, JESUS GIVES YOU REST BY TAKING YOUR YOKE.