

**02.23.25 ~ Epiphany 7**  
**“The Hospitality of Sacred Rest”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Psalm 130-131** <sup>NIV</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; <sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. <sup>3</sup> If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. <sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. <sup>6</sup> I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. <sup>7</sup> Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. <sup>8</sup> He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

**Psalm 131**

<sup>1</sup> My heart is not proud, Lord, my eyes are not haughty; I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me. <sup>2</sup> But I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content. <sup>3</sup> Israel, put your hope in the Lord both now and forevermore.

**Leader: These Words of Prayer and Praise Are from God.**

**People: Thanks be to God!**

**Hebrews 4:9-13** <sup>NLT</sup>

<sup>9</sup> So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For all who have entered into God’s rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. <sup>11</sup> So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.

**Leader: These Words of Rest Are from God.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

God of Sacred rest, we thank you for our time together throughout the week. We gather again to worship you in fellowship, praise, and rest. Thank you for the concept, your words, prayers, and music already experienced together. Help us to hear **your** message of deep purpose and hospitality in my words today. Clear our thoughts, Lord, to receive your direction as we continue this topic, especially how we can apply it personally and redemptively. May **your** voice renew, refresh, and strengthen us for the weeks to come and motivate us to rest easy and lightly in your love, forgiveness, daily Scripture, and abiding presence. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

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Last week we defined extravagant, radical, and vital hospitality and the differences between each. We remembered that there is a superficial, surface hospitality that comes with many expectations, and then, there's a deeper, intentional, loving, and generous hospitality that is vital to life and living in this world with ourselves and one another; that type is unconditional with no reciprocity expected. To get to this last preferred and Biblical version of vital hospitality, we must individually and spiritually be transformed into the likeness of Jesus' example with agape love need-meeting practices that generate energy rather than drain it. If you've ever put on a social event out of obligation rather than love, you know what I mean about the differences. The obligatory event quickly burns us out, whereas, the loving event restores and energizes us, even if we are physically tired.

To further discover this difference, we must go back to Genesis and God's hard work of creating the earth and humankind. In Genesis 2:1-3, we hear: “<sup>2</sup>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

That example illustrates that even the most powerful creator and being had to or chose to take time to rest and renew. That could be somewhat confusing if God is omnipotent. It is also where our cultural mandate to be productive six days a week comes from and the old Sunday blue laws where shops had to close for rest and church on Sunday came from. During our work lives, don't we usually rest from our labors on the weekend? In today's more secular world, with fewer people attending

church and learning about God, we see more activities 24/7 with no specific time for rest, even in the schools.

But the Genesis passage is not the model Jesus taught in Matthew 14: “<sup>13</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened [*that John the Baptist had been killed*], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.” Jesus went away to grieve the loss of his friend and cousin. Even that short rest gave him energy to work miracles of healing. If you keep reading, you see how the disciples wanted the crowds to go away so they could rest more, but Jesus’ divine power from his father was restored and energized quickly because he was meeting the needs of the people through his love. He then performed the 5 loaves and fishes miracle to feed the crowd of 5,000. Keep reading and you see that more rest was required:

<sup>22</sup> Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>23</sup> After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside **by himself to pray**. Later that night, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Jesus sandwiched his work of miracles between periods of sacred rest. That was not just a nap, like we have been taught over the years. What I mean by sacred rest, as opposed to physical rest, is the time we spend in the presence of God, where he holds all our emotions, anxieties, fears, and responsibilities for us, so that we can truly rest and abide in his power, his strength, and his love. That is what Jesus did in this prayer time I read about, and his alone-ness. He was not lonely during this time; he was in sacred fellowship and restoration with his father in heaven.

Which kind of person are you in terms of resting? Do you rest after being exhausted from working? Or do you work from a rested and restored self and divine strength? The two psalms reveal that confession and forgiveness are elements that provide a sacred type of rest. One's head and heart can truly relax under God's mercy and plan. In Psalm 131:2, David added humility to those qualities of peace and rest. Being content, mature, and hopeful yield a restful spirit that, in God's care, becomes a divine and vital hospitality we can share with others.

Yesterday's food mission was another example of this for me. I had rested in both spiritual and physical needs while I was on a short retreat, and the pastors and chaplains I was with decided to donate several snacks they had brought but did not eat to the Food Mission! I was going to serve anyway, but having 2 bags of apples, mandarins, and extra Florida tangelos that Sally had donated from a friend's beautiful gift sort of perked me up unexpectedly. I washed serving bowls and decided rather than to leave them in the bags, I presented them in a luscious looking bowl of fruits and individually wrapped crackers and cookies. I had such pleasure creating this "offering" and received many thanks from our guests. That gave me an opportunity to explain it was God's gracious gift to them that day that I was just the carrier of it, much like our faith is. We are not the originator of Christ's love, only the vessel of it, but wow, what a message in this time of fear and degradation. Even though we fed a huge number of people yesterday, we were down about 15 families. We can only speculate that it was because of recent ICE detention crackdowns in the Annandale area.

Now let's look at the Hebrews passage. Although there were some faith problems with the Hebrew people, our passage shows them wrestling with this idea of appropriate, divine, or eternal rest. Repeatedly the writer says entering God's rest is dwelling in his presence through word, thought, and deed. He agrees that physical rest is necessary but not the only kind and temptation and sin lead to a spiritual desert and disobedience. An active dependence on God will sustain an obedient and submissive heart. We Christians have work to do and are tempted toward sin every day, so an abiding rest in Jesus' love and example will fortify our souls. How is it with your soul? How is it with your heart? Our labors do not have to be drudgery; a sacred rest provides us with God's hospitable strength and restoration. Christ's salvation and forgiveness provides a sacred rest of assurance and confidence in our actions. A branch cannot bear any fruit without the vine, nor can we as a church or Christ follower bear any fruit without our Heavenly father's love and presence (John 15):

<sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Bearing fruit may not seem like hospitality, but it is in our DNA and is part of this church's legacy and identity, so we must pay attention to how we prepare and continue to provide it. Sacred rest is one way; think about a toddler mom, grandparent, or great grandparent who needs to carve out just 15 minutes of silence while the child naps. That short rest refuels

them physically, emotionally, and spiritually to continue the mission of parenting! Even if you are retired, you work for the Lord in all your affairs and need sacred rest in him. Sometimes that rest comes within community. Sometimes, just this hour of worship refreshes the soul. The key is to remember that we don't just give hospitality; we are offered hospitality through the triune God. Will you receive it? Will you accept his presence and loving hospitality through the tool of Sacred Rest? And if you cannot abide in him now in a listening way, how can you expect Eternal Rest someday? Food for thought. Amen! ||

**Let us pray.** Jesus, we thank you for your teaching, your example, and your willingness to rest in your Father's presence. Open our minds to accept the sacred rest that comes from love and forgiveness. Give us your strength personally and as a church to answer our call to hospitality for 2025. May you encourage our abiding in daily rest and inspired Scripture; may you fuel our mission and purpose, reminding us of our motives to serve you and to share our faith. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.