

07.28.24 ~ Pentecost 10
“The Beauty of Sacred Rest”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 127:1-2 ^{NIV}

¹ Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.
² In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
toiling for food to eat—
for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Leader: These Are Wise Instructions from King Solomon.
All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 11:28-30 ^{NIV}

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Leader: These are Christ’s Words of Assurance.
All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear God, our healer and confidant, we thank you for this morning’s study and worship so far. We thank you, Lord, for provoking the imagery of beautiful sacred rest in your arms. Help us to perceive beauty in rest and not guilt or sloth. May we learn to have a better life and work balance as we study your Scripture. We ask you to strengthen our discipline to spend more time with you in the sacred and restorative rest only you can give. Take away life’s anxieties and replace those feelings with confidence and love. We thank you in advance for the work of this church as the membership meets after the service. Finally, open these Scriptures to empower and motivate us to serve you first as we refuel from the rest of your grace and salvation. May my reflections be your words. Amen.

Good morning, church! Is it really a good morning today? Or are you a bit tired after the weekend? Rhetorical question for you to consider: how many hours of sleep did you really get last night? 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10? Any number that works well for your body is good; I’m not your doctor or here to judge. Some days we get more than other days, and since we

are all mature adults, I am not here to chastise you. The reason I ask, though, is to provoke you to think about it and how it affects your health physically, mentally, emotionally, and yes, spiritually. Sleep is the body and mind's way of renewing itself. God created us to require sleep as he created the world to provide a night cycle to receive renewal. We have a day for Sabbath rest as well; how do you spend it? For some, Sunday cannot be their Sabbath due to life obligations. So, pick another day as your Sabbath. Our lives become full of habits and routines, most of which are good and helpful, but it is important every now and again to think about and reassess our routines, adjusting our habits as needed.

At the UBC breakfast yesterday, I asked the group about finding their own "deep waters." I'll ask you too: how and when do you seek quiet time alone with God? Do you calendar your TAG time (time alone with God)? What are you pondering these days? How do you draw closer to God, and to whom do you go to seek deep water or wisdom? Do we have an **intentional** routine of study, prayer, and contemplation? This may seem like more to do, but actually, the rewards of finding quiet time with God for listening are refueling and life giving. That is the beauty of sacred rest; it is not rest from exhaustion but rather rest to provide energy. One author says it like this: we are humans designed to work out of our rest, not rest because of our work. You may interpret "work" as you will.

One reason we need the rest is for healing. Brokenness happens to everyone; the body breaks in some physical form, the mind experiences grief or trauma, or the spirit disconnects from God's love. The beauty of *sacred rest* is where the broken places mend; God sees the fragments of your life in silent confession and knits them back together to form a

strong and useful testimony and a kingdom co-laborer. For you sports fans, even Olympic athletes, football, basketball, and baseball players take time to rest their bodies after grueling workouts or games. They get injured if they do not rest their muscles.

Another important point before we get to our Scriptures. Rest does not always mean **inactivity**. Sometimes the rest we need is doing something we really enjoy, like listening to music, watching a movie, reading a good book, preparing a delicious meal, or being with loved ones. There are different types of “rest.” Sacred rest means being in God’s presence no matter what you’re doing. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection lived from 1614-1691 as a lay brother in a Carmelite monastery in Paris, and wrote a popular text, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. He is best remembered for finding God in the garden and kitchen work of peeling potatoes or repairing sandals:

[God] is full of mercy and goodness. Far from chastising me, He embraces me with love. He makes me eat at His table. He converses and delights Himself with me . . . in a thousand and a thousand ways . . . when I apply myself to prayer, I feel all my spirit lifted up without any care or effort on my part . . . as if it was suspended yet firmly fixed in God like a center or place of rest . . . it is a holy inactivity.

So, for some, sacred rest is being still and silent; for others, interests restore us by working in the garden, touching the soil of God’s creation, or preparing the church for worship, serving other families in the Food Mission, or just sitting in silence on the patio or balcony, or reading the Bible in your favorite chair by the window. For some, it is the time with

God in the early morning, when we are praying, dozing off, and sorting through the day to come.

Many in our world today, particularly your children and grandchildren, don't sit still much during the day; they are booked solid, on a screen with headphones, and are exhausted. Can we try to set a good example for them? I remember my grandparents worked very hard in the town, the church, and their homes, but we always had quiet times on the porch to watch the world, listen to the doves and the quail coo at sundown, and just be. Do you have similar memories? Can you help to rebuild those memories for your family in this world of hustle and busyness? It is hard to sit still while others are flitting about, but I assure you, it is necessary and will reap eternal rewards to spend more time in God's presence and in contemplation of his will for your life.

That's what our Scriptures today are all about. The psalmist says it is vanity to work without the Lord's blessing. A person who trusts in the Lord and his provision will find rest and good sleep in God's loving arms. If we are not resting in his presence intentionally and daily, doesn't that mean that we don't trust God to provide or fill our needs? Jesus tackled this dilemma among his disciples in the Matthew 11 passage we all know so well. Jesus' rest is the yoke of wisdom that unites a person with himself. Jesus is that wisdom of knowing that his provision of completed salvation is the only thing we need. Discipleship then becomes joyful fellowship with the triune God rather than a legalistic task of preparing a Bible lesson or a sermon.

When a carpenter made a high-quality oxen yoke to tie two or more together for farming a row, it was said "the yoke fits well," meaning there

would be no chafing of the animals' necks. Since Jesus was a carpenter, a legend claims he marketed his yokes because they "fit so well" and used that metaphor to help his disciples see that time with him was well spent and easy. We interpret this passage that Christ will make our lives easy, but that is not always true. Instead, in the midst of life's difficulties, let us say that the chafing will be less! If we become Jesus' yokemate, by linking ourselves to him, we become his apprentices, learning from and leaning on Christ's instruction and leadership of the farming "team." When I was in Lancaster, I saw a farmer leading a team of 6 mules to plow his land! They were actually graceful as they made the turn all yoked together, despite the heat and strain.

Isn't that what our Church Covenant is all about? Us working together as a church for the Kingdom of God, and dealing with things together, even the difficult things? But if we have not received our restorative sleep or refreshing Godly restfulness, aren't we cranky and unkind? How can we serve an already hurtful and distrustful community if we do not reflect the face of Christ's compassion? I noticed a lot of stress and embarrassment in the faces of some waiting for food yesterday, so I visited with them as they waited, and shared the story of how we started the food mission and how the three churches are learning to work together. I shared how we needed their help and patience in order to help each other. We need to move a chalkboard there and provide crayons and coloring books for waiting children. We laughed about our language shortcomings and found a volunteer to help us in the future. It became joyful, not stressful. I witnessed some judgment from exhausted volunteers and realized that I had a unique pastoral gift to offer – Jesus

and the peace he gives me every day if I spend enough time resting with him. I had just had a wonderful fellowship breakfast, so I was ready to help out of a rested spirit! What about you? Last week, we were called to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). Is that how you spend your rest? If you do, it will be both sacred and full of beauty and kindness to others! Amen. ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, the great physician, we humbly thank you today for these reminders of our responsibility to rest in you and let you do the heavy lifting in our lives. We are weak but you are strong! May your Spirit strengthen us and empower us every day to be your disciples, and to lead others to you until your return. Please give us the discipline to slow down when we need to, embracing your presence in both daily activity and holy inactivity. Enrich our lives with sacred rest so that we can serve you and this community in new ways; and, Lord, be with us as we conduct the business of your church. Jesus, it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**