

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, October 27, 2021

Providing Benches

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

—Matthew 11:28

O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing.

—Edmund Hamilton Sears, *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear*

On a recent afternoon I found myself between appointments and pleased to have a moment to rest, collect my thoughts and scratch out a few sermon notes. All I needed was a place to sit for an hour, and there was where the problem began. At the moment, I was in an area populated by professional buildings, and though they had well-groomed lawns, there were no benches to be found. I could have stayed in my car as that often serves as a temporary office space, but on such a pleasant day that seemed most unsatisfying. It then dawned on me that I was blessed to be in the right neighborhood, for just a few blocks away was a United Church of Christ with a small park area. (Thank you, Church of the Apostles, Lancaster!) Before facing the rest of my day's responsibilities, I was able to enjoy a pleasant rest in a lovely garden. It was a refreshing time and a real bright spot in my day. I just needed a little rest.

The world is terribly short on benches, and this is not a new problem as for many years they have been slowly disappearing. It is often feared that park benches will attract vagrants and vandals. They are one more item to maintain and around which the mower must work. Restaurants aren't so fond of public benches as they want customers to come into their businesses. This all makes for an increasingly rest-less world, and this is not only a problem for our seniors. Whether one be in the sixty-plus crowd or a twenty-year-old, weary feet can become awfully flat, and a place to rest is a real need.

I mention all this, not to complain, but to present an important question. Are we providing benches? St. Luke's seems to do pretty well on this as we have two park benches in our front yard, a handful of picnic tables in our grove and even a small bench outside our narthex doors. Up until COVID, we had our *Lunch With Luke* Wednesday meal ministry (and we pray that before too long it will return) where many tired folks have been refreshed by a good meal, good company and a comfortable chair. This is a great start, but are there more places and ways that we can be providing rest? Our times of worship and the Sunday school hour can be a

season of restful refreshment. As preacher and worship planner I need to continually remember that important aspect of worship. Are we doing enough to provide rest for the many weary ones who come our way?

This is a great question for our own homes and lives. A home can be a wonderful way station of rest and renewal, and we rightly celebrate Mary, Martha and Lazarus' home in Bethany as such a recharging station for our Lord. Many are petrified at the thought of opening up their homes as we have fallen so sadly short of the Martha Stewart standard, but all that most folks really want is a comfortable chair and a place of caring. We can also give others rest simply by the way we greet and receive them. When we meet people throughout the day, are we giving them an opportunity to be at rest and to receive our supportive presence, or are we too quick to spill our own troubles and thoughts? (I plead guilty on this one.) A phone call or a card can give more restful refreshment than we know.

Jesus promised that all who come to Him will receive rest, and this is a cherished promise. Having found rest in Christ's presence, are we ready to pass on the blessing? It's not so hard to do. We all need to be asking ourselves, "How can I provide a weary soul with a little rest?" for the world is terribly short on benches.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God of peace, who hast taught us that in returning and in rest we shall be saved, and in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: by the might of thy Spirit lift us, we pray thee, to thy presence, where we may be still and know that thou art God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —J.W. Suter