

Where is the Sanctuary?
Pastor David Seabaugh
Immanuel, Elmhurst

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. 2 Samuel 22:2-3

If someone would come to our church building and ask, “Where is the sanctuary?” I have to think that everyone would point to the room with the vaulted ceilings where we gather to worship. Indeed, we call that room a “sanctuary.” Have you ever wondered why we call it that? If you look up sanctuary in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, you’ll find the first definition describing something like our worship building, but it’s the second definition that grabs my attention, “a place of refuge and protection.” Words like refuge and protection hit me in a surprisingly emotional place these days. This world is crazy. I need refuge. I need protection. That’s exactly what we find when we come to worship.

If you haven’t come to worship for a while, I can relate. Neither had I. Let me explain. I’m a pastor. My job is to prepare an experience where we can know that God is our refuge, where we can listen to Him and sing to Him and pour our hearts out to Him. I study hard to prepare remarks that help us to deeply internalize the teachings of our Messiah, Jesus. I refine this sermon and deliver it with precision. I love what I do. However, my intense focus on serving you often inhibits me from taking that deep breath and truly resting in His sanctuary.

I had that opportunity just a few weeks ago. My family returned a day early from vacation and had a Sunday at home. We visited a church that I had wanted to attend for some time. Once I got over the awkwardness of sitting in a pew and not in the front, I settled in. Even though I had just returned from a very relaxing vacation, I realized how much I needed to rest in Jesus. My body had relaxed, but my spirit needed a recharge. It was as if I hadn’t been to worship in months. Without responsibility to distract me, the words of the hymns lit up in my heart. The scripture readings and the sermon spoke to me in a surprising, even shocking way. The baptism that day nearly brought me to tears. The joy of the people was infectious.

I needed that

We all do. None of us are so strong or spiritually mature that we don’t need to gather with God’s people around the word and the sacraments and take that deep breath. We need sanctuary. The relentless pace of activity and expectations leave us running on fumes, often hitting empty before we realize it. We need sanctuary. The world increasingly accepts beliefs that are contrary to our own. Standing on God’s truth and loving everyone is an exhausting tightrope to walk. We need sanctuary. Add to all of this our daily struggle with sin and selfishness, our public hurts and our inner turmoil. We need sanctuary, and not just any sanctuary. We need the refuge of God’s love and forgiveness earned for us through Jesus. We just need it.

I find it ironic that, in a time when the world seems to be coming apart at the seams, worship attendance is still trending down. Can we buck the trend? I know some of you

are in worship every week, but that's not a majority of our people. Try it. Get a worship streak going. Test it out. I am confident that even four weeks of consecutive worship attendance will change your life for the better. You'll have more inner peace. You'll have better insight on what's going on in our world. You'll know how to be a better parent, friend, or coworker and know how to handle conflict through confession and forgiveness. Best of all, you'll have a closer walk with Jesus, whose love has saved you and given you a sanctuary.