

Sermon Title: **“Refuge and Sabbath”**

Bible: **Psalm 71:1-6 & Luke 13:10-17**

When: on Sunday, August 21, 2022

Where: about 30 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, you are our refuge and our comfort. From our hectic lives, we come to you. Be with us in your grace and freedom. Let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. My Smart Phone and My Time**

Eating is one of my joys. Usually, before eating, I take a photo of my meal. One of the benefits of living in the States is that we can enjoy a lot of diverse foods. Some foods are authentic, and some foods are Americanized, but we can still taste various foods with our loved ones. Food itself gives us not only energy but also joy. Meal fellowship gives us a lot of love and good memories. When we have meals, where are our cellular phones? Are they in our pockets, on the table, or in our hands? While my wife is out of the country, I have realized that when I have meals, my smart phone is in my hands. Fortunately or unfortunately, my smart phone tracks my screen time. With my smart phone, I watch a lot of YouTube. My favorite sport, the Korean Volleyball League, started last week. I watched almost all of the games. I do some work using my web browser and email. I need to use a GPS application to drive here and there. Even though there is a time difference, I spend some

time talking and doing FaceTime with my wife in Korea. Thankfully, I do not forget to have a time of meditation, a centering prayer. This screen time tracker shows me where I spend my time, and lets me think of my lifestyle.

## **2. Refuge and Sabbath**

Today's scripture readings of the Psalms and the Gospel of Luke from the lectionary allow us to think of our lifestyles. In our hectic lives, we need refuge and sabbath. We need a time and a place to take a rest, and to be ourselves. Our society might tell us to fight, to do more, not to stop, and to continue to struggle and work harder. But we need a safe place. We need time to rest.

## **3. Refuge, Church, and the Lord**

Have you cried aloud in the church? Do you feel safe when you cry in church? Usually, when we come to church, what we can show and see is 'the best' us. We might take a shower, wear nice clothes and shoes. Our hairstyles are great. Our faces are full of joy and smiles. But when we are in trouble, can we come to church as who we are? Because of our sorrows, because of our struggles, because of our brokenness, when we cannot be our best selves, can we still come to church? Even when we might be our worst selves, can we come to church? Can we feel safe when we share our sorrows, struggles, and brokenness? Can we cry and break down at the church?

As a pastor, I need to admit that sometimes, it is not easy for the church to be a safe place to share our worst selves. Our sorrows might not be understood. Our struggles might be judged.

Our brokenness might be seen as shameful. We would like to show the best of ourselves, not the worst of ourselves. But don't we need our Lord as our refuge?

In Korean churches, there is a very early morning service everyday, like at 5am. It is kind of common and popular. Why do Korean people like that early morning service? I still remember one very interesting and meaningful interpretation. At 5am, we cannot be at our best. It is totally understandable to be at our worst. Wearing pjs at church is fine. No makeup and no hairstyle is fine. As it is still dark, and as the church lights are not on over the pews, it is safe and okay to be at our worst, and we can focus only on our Lord. After the service, there is a time of personal prayers. Many unspoken prayers are there. A lot of tears are there. Then, many Korean Christians meet the Lord as refuge, rock, and fortress. That's why the early morning service is still powerful in Korea.

It takes time and courage to know that our church is a safe place to share our sorrows, struggles, and brokenness. But I would like to say that our Lord is refuge, our rock, and our fortress. When I had sorrows and brokenness, I brought them to the Lord. It is okay to bring them to the Lord. I dared to bring even my anger to the Lord. I found that God's love and grace is more than our sorrows, our brokenness, our struggles, and our anger. Like the author of Psalm 71, please come to the Lord. There is no shame, but a refuge.

#### **4. Sabbath and Freedom**

In our hectic lives, we need to stop and rest. I am still learning how to take a rest and how to take a Sabbath. To take a rest from our busy and stressful lives, some people try to find

something that could free us, but what they find to escape can be addictive. There are a lot of addictions, because our lives are not easy. Life is tough. It is challenging. Sometimes it causes suffering. Addiction is very powerful, because it lets us forget our reality. It seems like it gives us rest and freedom from our suffering, our challenges, and our reality. But the addiction does not make us free; we become a slave to it instead. There is no freedom, because eventually addiction will control us. There will be no more 'ourselves.' But when we take a sabbath, there is freedom, because there is God, and because we are ourselves. Sabbath leads us to be free, and to be alive!

Sometimes, church life itself can be addictive, if it blocks us from meeting God. Sometimes, even our work itself can be addictive, if it consumes us. I love my church life, and my job as a pastor. Through my position and my church life, I experience God's holy presence, God's guidance, and God's challenge. But even though I love my job and my church life, I need to have a sabbath. Sometimes I can misunderstand my job and my church life as God. My work and my church life is not Godself. They are means of grace from God to me. But when they become God, not as a means of grace, it can be a kind of addiction. I love to serve the church, but I need to take a rest, take a sabbath, because what I need is neither my work nor my position, but the Lord. So, at least one day a week, I try to take a Sabbath, and actually, I am learning about how to take a Sabbath. Even though I love my church and my position, whom I love most is my Lord. My Lord gives me freedom and joy. The more I depend on God, the more freedom I have.

## **5. Closing**

Our Lord is our refuge. When you have sorrows, struggles, brokenness, please come to the Lord. There is no shame, but God's love and grace. Our Lord is the source of freedom. Ironically, the more we rely on God, the more we will be free. I know my smartphone is important in my current life. But I will put it aside, and I will come to the Lord. Let us come to the Lord, as who we are!

### **Closing Prayer**

O Lord, please help us to come to you. As you are our refuge and our rest, we come to you. Please give us more faith and more courage to come to you. When we come to you, please show us your love, grace, freedom, and comfort! In Jesus's name. Amen.