

01 | REST EASY: CHURCH AS A SANCTUARY IN THE WORLD

By Derek Sweatman

Naming The Room

There are various names churches give to the room where all the singing and preaching happens, names like *worship center*, *theater*, and *main auditorium*. All of these are well and good, and there are no rules on what to name areas inside a church building. But for us, we chose to use the word *sanctuary*. Historically, the word has had two meanings in the church context. The first meaning is what you think it is: it's a place that's set apart for worship and prayer, a kind of "holy" space where people gather. The second meaning has to do with protection and safety – it's a place where people can find refuge and care, it's a place to rest.

The Great Invitation

Jesus once said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30, NRSV) These words are an invitation into the presence of Jesus, and that presence is a non-anxious one. Discipleship is framed in the language of rest, not anxiety. And the yoke is "easy." Yoke was both a metaphor for the Jewish Law and was also used for the specific teachings a teacher would pass on to their disciples. The yoke was also a literal piece of livestock equipment, a thing used to pair up two oxen side by side. Scholars talk about the possibility that Jesus is here referring to his presence in this journey he is calling us to, that he is *in the yoke* with us, walking next to us as we go. He is a partner on the pathway. Whatever meaning(s) lie behind his words, the invitation of Jesus is that we would enter into a relationship of rest.

Church As A Sanctuary

These words of Jesus have long been core for our church. They are the flooring on which everything else is built. Before Atlanta Christian Church is anything, it is first a place of rest for the weary, for those carrying the burdens that come with life and with faith. We offer the same invitation to find that rest, to find sanctuary, and to be at peace with God and with each other. This is for all who have been worn down by life, by faith, and even by church. In church, stress should be a bug, not a feature. Anxiety has no home in the "commonwealth of God."¹

THERE IS NO FEAR IN LOVE.

1 John 4:18

¹ I first heard this phrase from my friend and colleague, Rev. Jenelle Holmes, pastor of Ormewood Church.