

When I served as pastor in a local church, I mourned with the members over losses and was burdened with them over hardships. But, I also rejoiced with them over their celebrations. Now as a District Superintendent I supervise 165 congregations, 148 clergies and 39,898 lay persons over five counties. Now, I rarely hear the celebrations. Most of my time is spent counseling and engaging in conflict resolution. Majority of the calls I receive are calls of complaints, fear, and anxiety.

Our denomination is struggling and praying through what will happen to our future as the United Methodist Church. As a result, many are filled with anxiety and fear of the future.

Our country continues to experience the dark sin of racism. The one place, the church or synagogue, where people could feel peace and comfort is now a place of fear. The one place that was the most respected and revered in our country has now become a place where some walk boldly through the doors and commit great acts of hate.

Throughout our country, we are experiencing a rise in anxiety, fear, and discouragement. What is the hope of the country and the world? The church is supposed to be the vessel of hope for the world. But, in the sacred halls of local congregations, we also find schisms, fear, and anxiety.

We are experiencing trials in our country, our personal lives, and even in our local congregations. "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." II Timothy 1:7 ESV. As Christians, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He comes not bringing fear, but power; the ability to serve, live holy and victoriously. The Holy Spirit brings the love of God. The love of God is not about feelings, but service for others. And, the Holy Spirit brings self-control; the ability to control our thinking and actions in any situation.

Friends, to navigate through our tumultuous times it will take us putting aside the differences that keep us separated. If we continue to devour each other out of fear, we will all be destroyed in the process. The world needs to know there is a better way.

I remember when my dad taught me how to ride a bike without training wheels. I had a brand new pink bicycle. He took me to the local church in our community. I mounted the bike, and my daddy placed his hand on the back seat while I pedaled. I felt safe because I knew daddy was behind me guiding

me. Slowly, he lifted his hand from the bike. I experienced a few tumbles from the bike. But, I still felt safe and secure because my daddy was nearby. If anything happened, I knew he would come and rescue me.

When we allow the bondage of fear and anxiety to control our behavior we are quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit. When I learned to ride a bike, I shook off the restraints of fear and anxiety. Why? I trusted my daddy was present. Even when I took a tumble, he picked me up and made sure I was alright, placed me back on the bike to try again.

There is a saying, "I don't know what the future holds, but I know who holds the future." As a result, I have peace that surpasses all understanding. We are experiencing troubling times. But, I have faith knowing my heavenly Father is present. "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, and you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God." Isaiah 43:1b-3a ESV.