

# **Hope in the Midst of Crisis**

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Greetings In the Name of our Lord and Savior,  
Jesus Christ, my friends.

I am Stephen Grantham, Sr. pastor at First United Methodist Church in Moultrie, GA. This is the first time I have attempted to use technology to share a message with my congregation and the community as a whole.

We live in interesting, difficult and unprecedented times. In many ways our days are filled with frustration and fear. We wonder about a virus that we cannot see, affecting us and our loved ones and friends. Our hearts go out to those who have been affected and especially to the families of the ones who have died as a result of this illness.

It is interesting, as I have listened to the warnings, I discovered I am in an at risk group. I just turned 61 in February. That realization pulled up some real anxiety in me. I am sure many of you have felt anxious. This is very normal under the circumstances. Fear, panic, grief and rage may be a part of your experience as well.

As we think about the emotions of a time like this, I believe we need to hold to the faith God gives us. God is present with us in all situations. In the Old Testament, God hears the cries of the Hebrew children in Egypt and He provides them a way to freedom. When we read Numbers 13 we see them as they stand in the wilderness, longing for the land God has promised them. Moses sends 12 spies to the land to see what all is there. When the spies return, 10 of the 12 are afraid of the Giants in the land. Only Joshua and Caleb see God's promises fully. They get to enter the Promised Land and the other spies do not.

Our times are giving us plenty of room to be afraid. We can fear sickness, loss of life, loss of loved ones, loss of income, loss of productivity, loss of time to fellowship with our friends. These are the giants in the land of promise. The land is still full of promise for us. We have the opportunity to turn our fear into careful and thoughtful action.

John Wesley had three General Rules for the people called Methodists:

1. Do no harm.

2. Do all the good you can, in every way you can to everyone you can, as often as you can.

3. Stay in Love with God (attend to the ordinances of God through public and private worship, participation in the sacraments and a rich prayer life.)

1. Doing no harm is to stay at a distance to other people. Not passing along the virus to anyone else limits the harm being done. Our careful action in using social distancing, as difficult and as contrary to our way of living as this is, is to stop or to limit the spread the COVID 19 virus. This does work. The pandemic would be far worse if we did not do this.

In 1919, our soldiers came back from WW I and brought something back with them they would not have wanted to if they had known. It was called The Spanish Flu. It ended up affecting 500,000,000 people worldwide, 27 % of the world's population. It killed 50,000,000 people.

In those days we did not realize how to stop such things and it overwhelmed the health care system. We know how to limit these things today.

Bishop Bryan, of the South Georgia Annual Conference, has reminded us that our use of good

judgement is not surrendering to fear, but acting with discipline and out of love. This is what love looks like right now. The apostle Paul says to us in I Corinthians 13:4-7:

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

2. Doing good is looking for opportunities in the midst of this time of social distancing. Call a friend who lives alone. Call an elderly person who has little family. If able, buy groceries for someone who cannot get out, who is in an at risk group. Spend quality time with your family. Read a good book. Watch a good TV show. Exercise. Develop a family schedule of study; chores, play time and quiet time. Staying at home with kids can be a challenge and most young people need a routine.

If there is a \$ 1,000.00 check sent from the Federal Government, maybe you do not need it, but an hourly wage earner you know does need it because they have been out of work or do not have the tips they once had. Sharing is a great

way to help others and to spare yourself times of misery.

3. Stay in Love with God: Keep misery at bay, by not giving in to frustration and fear. Worship, prayer, scripture reading and meditating on the scriptures will help. Our plan is to broadcast our limited worship service on Sunday morning at 9:30 AM on Facebook. Get with someone who has it or share it with someone who does not.

Remember this, God does not cause these things to happen. God does act in the midst of these things when they are happening to His people. He is with us as He is with us in the good times.

Remember this verse: **II Timothy 1:7**

<sup>7</sup>for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

We can do many things that are good while we are waiting for this global health crisis to come to an end. Pray for our health care workers. They need our prayers and our encouragement. Pray for many others as well. These are not easy times.

God is with us and His Spirit will give us courage.