

May 27 devotional

I give to you today the uplifting words from our Bishop.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." -Romans 15.13

Dear Friends,

On most of our calendars, tomorrow, May 28, was marked as the beginning of the 2020 session of the Upper New York Annual Conference. Every year, I am filled with anticipation to gather together and share in times of worship, fellowship, learning, and yes even business. Like you, I will miss that gathering tomorrow, but look forward to the time when we will indeed gather together and share the hope we have together in Jesus Christ!

The hope of Christ and all that reality brings is a truth that we and our world continue to desperately need. Amid a pandemic that has changed so much about life, we need the hope of Christ. For the sorrow and pain that has come in illness and death across our world, we need the hope of Christ. For the insecurity and financial hardships that many are experiencing, we need the hope of Christ.

The list could go on and on and the truth is that anything and everything included in that list is an ever-present reality in the world around us apart from a global pandemic. Our world is hurting, desperate and in many ways broken. The acts of racism that resulted in the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd are just the latest reminders of a world filled with injustice and evil.

While our day-to-day lives have been different over the last few months, the need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ remains constant. The mission of the Church to offer the light of Jesus into a dark world is urgent. We must continue to boldly speak out and show a different way - a way that brings justice to all and eliminates racism and other forms of injustice and oppression that too often permeate our world and the lives of those around us.

As our hearts continue to be changed through the powerful, transforming grace of God in Christ, our lives and our voices must offer that same invitation to those around us. While we must continue to work for systemic changes in the structures of our society, we know that real change will only be realized when hearts and minds are changed because of an encounter with the living Christ. May that change begin with us and then with courage and urgency let us invite others to a heart-changing, life-altering relationship with Jesus!

I continue to give thanks to God for the leadership and ministry you have offered in these days. There have been challenges and frustrations, yet God has and will continue to use all that you offered. Thank you for being faithful to God's call upon your life! Thank you for being the Church of Jesus Christ!

As we continue to move through the reopening phases, please continue to be patient with yourself and one another. While there are many messages and opinions regarding when and how to take different steps and actions, our first concern must continue to be for the safety and health of each member within our congregations and the communities we serve with and among.

Thank you for your willingness in continuing to not hold in-person worship through this Sunday, May 31. We know that many are anxious to return to in-person gatherings, while maintaining a commitment to care for the safety and health of our church and community members.

If your congregation determines to begin gathering in-person starting the first Sunday of June, I remind you that all churches must follow the guidelines of their county or local municipality regarding the number of people who can gather and strictly follow those guidelines. If you do gather according to the numbers allowed, we remind you that the use of masks is required, along with practicing strict social distancing. Currently, Governor Cuomo has indicated that the state is now allowing religious gatherings up to ten people. According to the Governor's plan full congregation religious services would reopen as part of phase four of the governor's four-phase plan.

Even as we move through the various phases of reopening, we recognize that some situations require continuing online worship only and we offer our FULL support for those who make that decision.

As I have stated many times, if there is anything I or other Conference leaders can offer in coming alongside your leadership and ministry in these days, please let us know. We cannot address a need if we do not know it exists. Be assured of my ongoing prayers for each of you!

As we prepare to celebrate the Day of Pentecost, we acknowledge and claim the gift of the Holy Spirit within our lives. Through the Holy Spirit we are filled, equipped and empowered with the very presence of God to accomplish anything God calls us to. Let us offer our lives in a fresh way to the promise and reality of God's Spirit! May we cry, "Come Holy Spirit!"

In closing, I want to share John Wesley's Prayer of Submission that I used at our most recent prayer gathering and many of you requested to receive. May we join in this prayer, trusting our God to continue to mold and shape us, filling us with all joy and peace so that we may abound in hope through Jesus Christ!

"To you, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, my Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, I give up myself entirely. May I no longer serve myself, but you, all the days of my life.

I give you my understanding. May it be my only care to know you, your perfections, your works, and your will. Let all things else be as dross unto me, for the excellency of this knowledge, and let me silence all reasonings against whatsoever you teach me, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.

I give you my will. May I have no will of my own. Whatsoever you will, may I will and that only. May I will your glory in all things, as you do, and make that my end in everything. May I

ever say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you." May I delight to do your will, O God, and rejoice to accept it. Whatever threatens me, let me say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him." And whatever befalls me, let me give thanks, since it is your will concerning me.

I give you my affections. Dispose of them all. Be my love, my fear, my joy; and may nothing have any share in them, but with respect to you and for your sake. What you love, may I love; what you hate, may I hate; and that in such measures as you are pleased to prescribe for me.

I give you my body. May I glorify you with it, and preserve it holy, fit for you, O God, to dwell in. May I neither indulge it, nor use too much rigor toward it; but keep it as far as in me lies, healthy, vigorous, and active, and fit to do you all manner of service that you shall call for.

I give you all my worldly goods. May I prize them and use them only for you. May I faithfully restore to you, in the poor, all you have entrusted me with, above the necessities of life; and be content to part with them too, whenever you, my Lord, shall require them at my hands.

I give you my credit and reputation. May I never value it, but only in respect of you; nor endeavor to maintain it, but as it may do the service and advance your honor in the world.

I give you myself and my all. Let me look upon myself to be nothing, and to have nothing, apart from you. Be the sole disposer and governor of myself and all; be my portion and my all.

O my God and my all, when hereafter I shall be tempted to break this solemn engagement, when I shall be pressed to conform to the world and to the company and customs that surround me, may my answer be: "I am not my own. I am not for myself, not for the world, but for my God. I will give unto God the things that are God's. God, be merciful to me a sinner." AMEN.

Grace and Peace,