



That Time Has Come!

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“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

2 Timothy 4: 3-5

For over four generations the roots of Methodism have run deep in the soil of my family. Beginning with my great-grandfather Peter, my grandfather Edward, and my father Robert, the only spiritual home that me and my ancestors have known has been the Methodist Church. As a young boy, to this day I can vividly remember my grandmother “marching” me and my sisters in an orderly cadence on any given Sunday to the Trinity East Methodist Church in Houston, which by the way, is still located on McGowan Street where several generations of Hayes’ have called home.

The influence that this denomination has had upon me and my family is incalculable. It has birthed several ministers, beginning in 1901; Methodist related schools and universities have educated the second and third generation of my extended family; **all my** secondary learning was obtained at institutions that were begun by the Methodist Church. Marriages, baptisms and celebrations of life have all been conducted in sacred sanctuaries of Methodist churches stretching from deep East Texas to the inner city of Houston since 1929. Simply put, my family has been fed and sustained by the fruit of God’s Word that yielded its bounty to Peter Hayes in a little Methodist church in Mineola, Texas, and it has sustained and nourished us for over one hundred and fifty years.

But now, the tree that bore the fruit is bare. The soil has dried up and there is no shade to shield me from the scorching heat of reality—the reality that my church—the dear Methodist Church I love is now unrecognizable, and is, to say the least, being frayed by groups and entities within the denomination who have refused to follow and uphold the binding laws of the church found in *The Book of Discipline*, or, to abide by decisions of the Judicial Council (the Supreme Court of the UMC). Currently, there are jurisdictions, conferences, and even bishops who blatantly and openly reject and defy the Constitution of our denomination, its doctrine, general rules, and polity, thereby creating a “do whatever you want attitude,” and, in turn, have created a chaotic and untenable situation. Without rules, structure and laws to govern what is expected of its laity and clergy as we seek to be effective witnesses in the world as part of the whole body of Christ, that body is torn apart. Mere words cannot describe the heartbreak, pain and agony that I (and millions of others) are experiencing, but this one thing I know: **God didn’t bring us this far to abandon or forsake us.**

In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, his son in ministry, he writes: **“A time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.”** He goes on to say: **“They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”** My dear friends, that time has come! It’s as if Paul knew that the true body of Christ—the Church—would always and forever be attacked by the disease of self-interest and tossed about by the damaging winds of social change. And true to his prophetic vision, it happened then and is happening now as the modern-day church finds itself once again in the wilderness of our discontent.

But this is nothing new for followers of Jesus. It seems that the Church is constantly engaged in a battle between the way of Christ, and the way of the world. And therein lies the problem: do we follow the Holy Word of God that has been handed down to us for more than two thousand years, or do we change or amend that sacred Word to suit our own self-interest and desires? Hebrews 4:12 says: **“For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edge sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”**

Please hear me well: This is NOT a minor squabble over people having the freedom to choose how they want to live or the lifestyle they prefer. Rather, it is a major conflict that goes to the very heart and soul of who we are as children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, and how we have made the conscious decision to follow the dictates of God and not be caught up in the ways of the world nor be defined by the world’s values.

When the Apostle Paul established Christian communities from Antioch to Ephesus, and from Athens to Corinth, quite often disputes, conflicts and divisions would arise in those churches. When Paul stepped in to encourage them to embrace and follow the way of Jesus, he was not always met with a warm reception. In one instance in the Corinthian church, Paul was insulted, and his apostolic authority challenged. I can only imagine how many times this happened to him, but because of the transforming call that was given him on the road to Damascus to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, he persevered, and the seeds of Christianity were planted despite opposition and the misrepresentation of what it meant to be followers of Jesus.

Today, there are serious disagreements among Methodists, both theological and ideological, that threaten to undo our understanding of who we are and what we believe. The Social Principles of our denomination that oversee our stance on issues dealing with human sexuality have been broken; deep division exists over the integrity of the Holy Scriptures; and one of the most disconcerting differences rising out of our dysfunctional state is how some are even now questioning the identity of God and the divinity of Jesus. This cannot continue.

In paraphrasing Paul’s words to Timothy, we must: **“keep our heads, endure hardship, do the work we’ve been called to do as proclaimers of God’s truth, and discharge the duties of our ministry.”** In other words, we, too, must persevere because we have no other choice.

The decisions we make in the coming weeks about how we will respond to the challenges ahead of us will have a profound effect on those who will follow us. But as for me and my house, I will serve the God who has been faithful in all generations, and who works to bring good out of every circumstance

