



April 2018

Dear North East District Family,

Happy Easter! I pray you have had a joyous celebration of Jesus' resurrection. I also pray that you remember that Easter lasts for 50 days and ends on Pentecost (May 20). Every day of this special season, I challenge you to find ways to celebrate and share new life, hope, and victory over sin, evil, and death.

Easter is truly a season of hope and new life. I reiterate that because I also know that there is a lot of anxiety in our denomination right now. People are concerned about what the Council of Bishops will propose as a way forward in the human sexuality debate. The special called General Conference in February of 2019 is now less than a year away. There is deep concern over the decline of the church and whether certain local churches will survive or if they'll have to close. There is angst over the division our culture finds itself in – one of the most polarized times I can remember in my 43 years of life. All of this anxiety takes a toll.

I don't want to minimize any of the issues I just wrote about. They are all important, urgent even. Some of them will likely forever change how we do church and who we are. I do want to remind you, however, that there is one thing that will never change: Jesus and his saving-power over all creation! The church may come to an impasse over human sexuality, but Jesus will still be Lord! Decline may continue and your local church may even close; but, Jesus will still be your forever friend guiding you with grace and leading you forward. Our culture may become even more divided and polarized, but the Lordship of Jesus will be steadfast.

I don't know about you, but I take great comfort in that. When I find myself getting worried (and I do, at times), the Holy Spirit usually taps me on the shoulder and reminds me of Moses words to Israel as it took the Promised Land in Deuteronomy 7:9, *"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments."* I can honestly say that not once has God failed to be faithful in my life. That faithfulness hasn't always looked how I imagine it would, but God has always been faithful.

In the meantime, what should we do while we anxiously await the future? Be faithful in return! Carry out the mission of your faith communities. Work hard to "canoe the mountains" and find new ways to make disciples of Jesus. Commit yourself and your church to being as faithful as possible until God reveals a new way. If we focus on that, we can't go wrong.

On a personal note, please let me say how grateful my family and I are that the District Conference approved the purchase of a new district parsonage. We closed on a new parsonage on Monday, April 2 and will move in on Wednesday, April 4. It's in the Mandarin area of Jacksonville near Loretto Road and Old St. Augustine Road with great access to I-95 and I-295. It's also in a good school district. We are excited about this new chapter and appreciate you helping us with it.

Don't let anxiety steal your resurrection joy! God bless you and Happy Easter!

All God's love,
Jay

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