

JANUARY 2023 MESSAGE FROM THE LAY LEADER

Dear Lillian UMC family,

In Matthew 24, when asked for a sign of His return, the very first thing Jesus named was deception. I am not setting a date for the Second Coming, because the deception He predicted started many generations ago and is increasing.

The Apostle Paul also warned the Church about leaders *"having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. Avoid such people . . . while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."* (2nd Timothy 3) He warned of deceivers inside the Church, *appearing* to speak the truth while denying the power of the Word of God. They lead people astray because they have deceived themselves. Paul continued, *"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth..."* (2nd Timothy 4) He warned that the truth will no longer matter to these teachers and leaders. They knowingly distort the scriptures for their own ends.

His answer to the deception is to *"continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed"; "All scripture is breathed out by God."* (2nd Timothy 3) *"preach the word", "reprove, rebuke and exhort."* (2nd Timothy 4)

The answer to deception is to recognize the supreme authority of scripture over men's ideas, our experiences, and especially any sentimental and emotional ideas about what true love looks like. Then to resist any teaching that elevates experiences and emotions above the written Word of God.

As we enter the new year, we enter a time of discernment for this beloved church. Make no mistake, the United Methodist Church (UMC), as a denomination has changed. New traditions of men and deceptive teaching is taking the UMC into a direction never conceived nor tolerated by Wesley.

We must discern truth from deception. Especially deception in the form of half-truths and scriptures taken out of context. Issues such as same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexuals are merely the symptoms of the underlying problem. The authority of scripture, all scripture, and the truth of that scripture is the real issue. Jesus prayed to the Father: *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."*(John 17:17) The written Word of God is the truth.

The saying is profound, *"we must not sacrifice the truth of God, for the sake of unity."* Jesus came bringing Grace and Truth. (John 1) You cannot have one without the other. To love each other the way that Jesus loved is to love the truth. Pray for wisdom. Pray to discern the truth.

In Christ's Service,
Perry Cunningham – Lillian UMC Lay Leader