

**No Fear**  
**Carolyn Moore, Wesleyan Covenant Association Delegate Meeting**  
**November 2, 2018**

*You have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)*

I believe this is your job description as the first-ever delegates voted to lead the Wesleyan Covenant Association. We are borrowing it from Timothy who used it first, but it seems to have stood the test of time so I believe it is a word for us, too.

*You have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and self-discipline.*

When Timothy first hears this, he is a young and anxious pastor hanging by a thread. You can hear the anxiety in Paul's advice: "Take some wine for your stomach," he tells Timothy (which, by the way, is *not* in today's job description). This is Paul encouraging a young leader who is beginning to question his call because frankly, this is hard. Starting a new thing can give you stomach problems. Watching people slide backward after you've worked so hard to move them forward can make a person downright depressed.

And all the pastors said, "Amen."

Timothy is frustrated. It seems almost like the folks with whom he lives have gone deaf. The message he has for them seems to have no effect. Maybe they'd rather believe comfortable things than uncomfortable things. "Maybe Jesus was more like a ghost than a flesh-and-blood man," they say, because that is an easier answer to grab onto than the idea of a man who is fully human and fully divine all at once.

Battling heresy can wear a person out. Just ask Timothy.

And some of you are right there with him. You're tired. Tired of a situation that only reveals our corporate insanity. Tired of conflict and misunderstandings. Tired of the battle.

The question seems inevitable: Why bother?

Paul would say to us just by way of his example as he pours into Timothy: “*Here* is why we bother. Because the next generation matters. The biblical role of an elder is to ensure that the faith with which we’ve been entrusted is passed our generation to the next with integrity.” Paul encourages Timothy and then he challenges him.

*You have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, and love and self-discipline.*

This is your job description. This is what it means to be an evangelist, a movement-maker, a carrier of the gospel. Which *is* the power. Paul has teased out these words elsewhere so we know each word is a sermon in itself — power, love, self-discipline.

Paul told the Romans, “I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the *power* of God at work, saving everyone who believes.” The gospel is its own power. It doesn’t tell us how to *get* power. It *is* power.

The story of the Bible from beginning to end is the story of God’s power over our weakness. Paul tells the Corinthians in his letter to them that the word of the cross is precisely for those who are dying and for those who have been defeated. It is for those who feel powerless. The gospel is for the ones who have lost everything, who have seen it all get washed down the drain, who have tried this world on for size only to discover that it has no power to save us from anything.

Paul tells us the good news about Jesus is for *everyone* who believes. The Greek word for “believe” in this passage in Romans 1 has the same root as the Greek word for “faith.” Getting this word down is a key to everything. This brand of faith is not about accepting about a tick list of facts. And it isn’t (these are JD Walt’s words) a “kind of lever that we pull in order to make something else happen.” That’s how you birth heresies. Faith is the life of Jesus living itself out in me. It is fellowship with the triune God.

It is the kind of faith that drove Abraham up the mountain to make a sacrifice of his son. No other story more vividly paints what God is asking of us when he tells us to love him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, all our strength.

Because Abraham is possessed. He is a hundred-year-old man who finally has a boy of his own. And knowing *that* — knowing what he is asking of this man — God comes to Abraham and says, “I am going to make you into something great. You will be the father of many people. What you have in this boy, you will have in more children than you can count. But to get there, you and I have to walk through a valley together and to you it may feel like the darkest kind of valley. That valley will lead you to the point of laying down your deepest earthly loves so there is nothing left between us.”

“Abraham,” God seems to say, “This is what faith means. It is a decision to believe when it doesn’t make sense, accompanied by a love so fierce that nothing can compromise it.”

Can I say that again? ***Faith is a decision to believe when it doesn’t make sense, accompanied by a love so fierce that nothing can compromise it.***

This is the brand of faith God is asking of Abraham when he tells him to kill his son and burn the boy’s body. Brothers and sisters: this is what it means to make an affirmation of faith. This is a far, far cry from, “Please stand and turn in your hymnals to #881...”

This is different. Abraham, with the full weight of mature, history-shaping faith on his shoulders, stands between Isaac and God and proclaims: “The Lord himself will provide.” You ought to write that down because in that moment, with that line, Abraham shows us the difference between a people-centered faith and a person-centered faith.

This is exactly why we are here in this room. We are here because we believe deep in our spirits that the people we like and the people we have feelings for and the people for which we have great compassion and the people we want to see living holy lives and the people we want to see in Heaven are NOT the authors of our faith.

The author of our faith is Jesus Christ. We have a Person-centered faith, not a people-centered faith. Which is not to say, brothers and sisters, that we don’t love people! Remember Paul’s word: “You have been given a spirit of power and *love* and self-discipline.”

We love people and we are passionate about the things that break God's heart. People in need of mercy break God's heart but to have anything at all of value to offer people — any people — we have to go through the heart of God. Otherwise, we'll land short of the Kingdom. This is the brilliance of Abraham's brand of faith. He is unwilling even for the suffering required to stop short of the call of God. He is not willing to make choices rooted in emotion, comfort or convenience. There is no "spare sheep" in his backpack. No "contingency ram" in the trunk of his car.

If he wants to get to the ram in the bush, he has to walk all the way up that mountain with his boy. So Abraham walks with his son, but *he trusts in God*. And this is a good guide for us who begin this journey together. I want to walk with you while I trust in God.

At the top of that mountain Abraham and Isaac build the altar together. Isaac could have muscled his way out of this if he'd wanted to ... But Isaac is his father's boy. He has his father's spiritual DNA coursing through his veins. He is the second generation of a breed of people whose faith is centered on the person of God and not on personal tastes.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation to all who believe ..."

The only power you have is the power borrowed from faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray hard every day for God to give you Abrahamic faith, so that your presence in this movement has power.

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Love people. *Love* them. Love the "Samaritans" — folks who are not socially acceptable or fun to be around. Find your way into roomsful of people who are not like you so you can learn, as the scripture teaches, to love perfectly from a pure heart. This is not a call to agreement on issues. It is call to care for souls even as we follow Jesus.

Yesterday in our WCA Board meeting, Bob Kaylor talked passionately about the harvest. He said, "What people need is the truth of the gospel and a vital connection of churches in which

people are living it out authentically. They need to see a glimpse of the kingdom in action—communities in which people live out a biblical, comprehensive sexual ethic that leads to thriving and fulfilling marriages and singles who flourish in a family of faith that cares for them. They need to experience a community of compassion in which hurting people are finding wholeness, where sin and brokenness is taken seriously and where people have the spiritual and personal support to overcome it. In other words, they need a fresh field where they can grow and be fruitful. Our foundational Wesleyan DNA, lived authentically and passionately, is the fertile ground in which such a movement can be planted ... In a confused, angry, and disoriented culture, we will not draw people into the kingdom by being angry ourselves. We might win the field, but it's no good if the field is ravaged in the process. The harvest is what matters to Jesus and it's what should matter to us.”

My friends, the world is not the problem, the world is the prize. Let God break your heart for the world so you can love as Jesus loves. Faith is a decision to believe when it doesn't make sense, accompanied by a love so fierce that nothing can compromise it.

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Discipline is a gimme for us. The means of grace, the spiritual disciplines, are our distinctive as Methodists. Kevin Watson goes so far as to say that if we are not teaching and preaching the doctrine of entire sanctification then we are taking up a needless division in the Body of Christ. It brings us back to Timothy, who seemed ready to toss in the towel when Paul's letter reached him. This was precisely Paul's issue with Timothy, letting his anxiety unravel him. Paul needed Timothy to get his head in the game.

The Valley of Perseverance is a place on Mars. Earlier this year the rover named Opportunity got stuck there. Somewhere in mid-June, a dust storm kicked up, a big one that has since grown to epic proportions. Because Opportunity is powered by solar energy, the severe dust is keeping the rover's solar panels from being able to absorb light. So now, two months into this storm, there sits Opportunity surrounded by dust and grounded, unable to charge its batteries for the lack of light.

Researchers monitoring the situation are hopeful for two things to happen. Eventually, the dust storm will settle, they assume, though that won't be the end of Opportunity's challenges. When the dust settles, it will inevitably settle on the rover's solar panels, solving nothing. The second hope after the dust settles is that a wind will blow through and clear the panels of dust. This is a quote from a NASA report on the situation (but doesn't it sound like something out of Isaiah?): "The sun breaks through the haze over the Valley of Perseverance, and soon the light there should be enough to allow Opportunity to charge its batteries."

But for now, the only option open is to wait it out. I feel that little rover guy's pain.

I believe right now we are in the Valley of Perseverance. Circumstances beyond our control have us in a holding pattern ... waiting for the dust to settle ... waiting for the Holy Spirit to blow through ... But the waiting proves us. And shapes us. Paul says, "You've not been given a spirit of fear. If you have it, it is because you've taken it. You chose it over power, love and discipline. Fear is not in our job description."

In Paul's encouragement to first-century Christians dealing with pressures of faith, he writes that "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:2b-4). Perseverance in Paul's use of it is about handling pressure with grace. It is a solid biblical word that gives one the sense of a floor beneath the feet in confusing times. It is a prescription for allowing tough seasons to build character.

Friends, this storm will pass. The dust will settle. The wind will blow. The light will shine. The batteries will recharge. But while we wait, let the waiting sanctify us. Pray for the quality of your faith, pray for God to break your heart for the people who break his heart, pray for your own spiritual discipline (or perhaps confess the lack of it), and pray that we will persevere well, with integrity.