

My children were much younger. We had just moved from Eau Claire, WI to Fargo, ND, where I had agreed to serve as the Senior Pastor at First United Methodist Church. Needless to say, my children were not thrilled with the move.

My oldest daughter Amanda was going into her junior year in High School. Natalie was starting Middle School. Whitney was finishing Elementary school. Isaac was in Elementary school.

My daughters, in particular, were so mad about moving. They let me know, often, how upset they were over leaving friends, starting over, finding new friends, finding a new routine. Our move had gone fairly well, as far as moves go. But it was a move. And moves are stressful enough

We had been in North Dakota a little more than a week. We were just starting to get settled and went to a church function, so our family could be introduced to members of the church.

Then it happened. The torrential rains started to fall. Do you know what that is like? We received eight inches of rain in one hour. We ended the function early because of the terrible weather in the area.

While we were attempting to drive home, finding streets that weren't flooded. The stress in the car was growing. Life wasn't settled. Our house wasn't settled. It was all exacerbated by how my children felt about the move. That is when Whitney said, "Dad, I hate this. Can we go back to Eau Claire, now?"

Her response to the stress of the move, to the challenges we were facing was to want to go back to a safe place in her life. It is an understandable response. When you become stressed, how do you respond? Do you get angry? Do you lash out? Do start working? Do you want to run? Do you sleep? How do you respond to stress?

Today we are concluding our sermon series on *Stressed! Dealing with Life at the Boiling Point!* This week, we are going to talk about *Finding Light at the End of the Tunnel*. This doesn't mean what do we do when we come to the end of a stressful time. It is actually about developing a strategy when we go through stress that can help carry us to the end of it.

In our scripture for today, we are reading from the book of Revelation. This book was written during a stressful time, to a people who were facing difficulties. It is aimed at helping people to stay focused on God and not lose hope or lose sight. So, when stress comes our way, how can this scripture help us develop a strategy for dealing with it and living through it?

The First Piece of this strategy is to remind us that God has not forgotten us. God will reward our faithfulness. *Yes, I am on my way! I'll be there soon! I'm bringing my payroll with me. I'll pay all people in full for their life's work.*

When times of stress come, it is easy to feel alone. It is easy to feel overwhelmed, as if we are the only ones going through or facing what we are going through. Have you ever felt that way?

But even though you may feel alone, you are not. Chances are pretty good that whatever you may be facing, others have faced it before you. So, not only can you turn to God to have God walk with you through times of stress and challenge. But turn to others whom you love and care about who may have walked through what you are facing. God has not forgotten you, so stay faithful.

The second piece of developing a strategy is to remind us that God will be judging people for their actions. It is up to us to remain faithful. *How blessed are those who have faced the challenges and remained faithful. The tree of life is theirs for good. But outside are all who love and live lies.*

*"Come!" Say the Spirit and the Bride. Whoever hears, echo,
"Come!" Is anyone thirsty? Come!*

One of the things the book of Revelation is clear about is there are tough times. Sometimes, we as God's people do face challenges. This passage reminds us that God remains the judge.

What that really means is that when we feel hurt by others, we don't have to take matters into our own hands. We don't have to get even. Those who practice meanness, cruelty and deception, will as my mother used to say, "Get what is coming to them." Those who make life stressful and challenging will reap the reward of what they have sown often through broken relationships.

The challenge for us is how are we going to respond? Someone once said to me that in each hand I am holding a bucket of gas or a bucket of water. I can envision each situation that comes my way as a flame. The question I have to ask myself is am I going to throw the bucket of gas on the flame and make it a larger problem? Or am I going to throw a bucket of water on the situation and attempt to extinguish it?

What about you? Are you making your stresses worse by throwing gas on them or by throwing water on them?

What this means is that we need to be aware of how the stresses affect us, certainly, but we don't have to make them worse by throwing gas on them. We can take a breath and maintain a sense of perspective. We can still live out of a center of values and principles to guide us. We don't have to let people bully us or walk over us, when we lean on our values.

Finally, it means that we can be honest and speak with others who are bringing stress to our life. Paul reminds us in another part of scripture that we are to speak the truth in love to one another. That can actually help us face our challenges and figure out a way to get

through them. Speaking the truth, in love, actually helps resolve situations.

Reverend Ole was the pastor of the local Norwegian Lutheran Church, and Pastor Sven was the minister of the Swedish Covenant Church across the road. One day they were seen pounding a sign into the ground, that said:

'DA END ISS NEAR! TURN YERSELF AROUND NOW
BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE'

As a car sped past them, the passenger leaned out his window and yelled, 'Leave us alone, you religious nuts!'

From the curve they heard screeching tires and a big splash. . . Rev. Ole turns to Pastor Sven and asks, 'Do ya tink maybe da sign should yust say 'Bridge Out'?''

Ole and Sven could have solved several problems if they would have just spoken the truth in love. So can we.

When you are in the midst of challenging, stressful times, remember, these times too, will pass, eventually. We can get through them by remembering that we are not alone. God is coming. God is with us.

We can get through them by remembering that we don't have to get even, God will take care of that. We need to maintain a sense of perspective. We need to be willing to not exacerbate situations. We need to be willing to speak the truth in love.

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen