

Now Honorably Retired after almost 30 years of leading worship and working with congregations as a ruling elder, commissioned lay preacher, and minister of Word and Sacrament, I still ponder the question, “Where do I find hope?”

I still find hope in a sense of God’s peace in the midst of the ongoing long-term struggle to carry out God’s intentions of peace, justice, lovingkindness, and well-being for all of God’s creatures— our fellow human beings and all the plant and animal life on earth.

I still find hope in studying scripture and reflecting on the themes that speak to our 21st-century problems, including racial and gender injustice, profound inequality in economic and political power, and the climate crisis. I give thanks for the prophetic witnesses who are calling us to action to address these problems, and lifting up the vision of the Reign of God, which Jesus taught and practiced, and which is realized in the small and large efforts of people of faith working together.

As an interim pastor and supply preacher, I have worked with several small faithful congregations. Their courage, perseverance, and commitment to serving others, as the people they are, with the resources they have, give me hope and assurance that the Holy Spirit is working among us, and we should keep on trusting God and keeping our eyes and ears open for the openings and possibilities the Spirit offers us.

I still find hope in reflecting on this statement from the Barmen Declaration in our **Book of Confessions**:

*As Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God’s mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures. (**Theological Declaration of Barmen**, 8.14)*

God’s claim on our lives is publicly sealed in the sacrament of baptism, which is also the sign of our adoption into the Body of Christ.

I am thankful for God’s love, patience, and continuing challenges in my life. I am thankful that despite our mistakes, discouragement, apathy, and lethargy, God has not given up on the church. If we are prayerfully open to God’s surprises and opportunities, God will have work for us to

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do, regardless of our membership numbers. I trust that God will use our works of justice and lovingkindness in ways that may be far beyond our immediate awareness.

I am thankful for the faith of Jesus the Christ, who shared fully in human life and all its joys and sorrows. His inclusive, liberating ministry shows us how we are to minister to neighbors near and far in our daily lives. Though he was brutally executed by the Roman occupation government in his homeland, God raised Jesus from the dead, breaking the powers of injustice, sin, and death.

Because Jesus lives, we who trust in him are freed from the power of “the godless fetters of this world.” These fetters include societal structures of injustice, greed, and violence; ideologies and cultural messages that pressure us to deny our deliverance and freedom, and our own misguided desires, illusions, and fears. Through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, we can grow more and more into using our energy, imagination, compassion, skills, and material resources in service to God’s creatures, not only serving our human brothers and sisters, but also caring for the integrity, health, and diverse life of all of God’s creation.

Because of the deliverance we have been given in Christ, gratitude to God forms the foundation of our ministries of daily life, and especially our prayer and worship. When we come together in worship, we are giving thanks for our deliverance through prayer, hymns and songs, reflection on the witness of scripture, and the eucharist (Lord’s Supper). Through the action of the Holy Spirit, we share in the presence of Christ in the bread and the cup, and we are strengthened and reconnected as members of the Body of Christ in the world.

I am thankful for the Holy Spirit’s gifts of discernment in my life and ministry, insights from scripture and daily life, and hope and courage to keep on going, one day at a time, trusting that God will use me in any ways I can be useful.