

Sermon Outline
Burton Memorial United Methodist Church
“Peace in Troubled Times”
September 7, 2025

Scripture

Psalm 46:1-11
John 16:33

Core Idea and purpose

Core ideas from earlier sermons in the series:

- None. This is a standalone sermon

Core Idea: With God’s peace, we can make it through troubled times and thrive.

Purpose: To encourage people to continue the work of ministry, even when it is hard and troubling.

The Sermon

I am very glad that my administrative leave is over. Donna and I are extremely happy to rejoin you in our efforts to spread the love of Jesus. However, before we do that, I should give you an explanation as to why my administrative leave was required. You deserve that.

On June 23, 2025, I messed up. Although I did not come anywhere near physically hurting anyone, I did lose my cool. While talking with an individual, the individual became irritated and hastily walked away from me and made a hurtful comment. I followed this person to talk with this person about the hurtful comment. When this person again started walking away, I touched this person with open hands on the upper arm/shoulder to let the person know I wanted to continue the conversation. At this point I was yelling at this person to let the person know that I wanted to continue the conversation. When this person continued to walk away towards the fellowship hall doors, I placed myself between this person and the doors and banged on one of the doors out of frustration. This person then easily exited the building. So, out of a spontaneous outburst of frustration, I did 4 things: I touched a person with open hands, I yelled, I inserted myself between that person and the door, and I banged on the door.

This outburst is way outside my normal behavior. On that same day, I took it upon myself to seek counseling as a way of looking inside myself to figure out why I behaved in such an unusual manner. My latest counseling session was last Friday.

Also, on that same day, I contacted Marshall, our SPRC Chairperson, and our former District Superintendent, Simon Osunlana. When Simon’s successor,

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Vidales Lopez, began her tenure as District Superintendent on July 1, 2025, I contacted her as well. You all met Pastor Vidalis on July 20, 2025 when she announced my administrative leave.

During the administrative leave, I went through what is called a complaint process in accordance with the United Methodist Book of Discipline. The purpose of this process was to develop a just resolution to help bring about reconciliation and develop measures to prevent a repeat of the behavior. I went through this process with DS Vidalis, Assistant to the Bishop Alex Shanks, and Pastor Steve Hart, who acted as my clergy support person. The just resolution resulted in six requirements of myself and church leadership, which I have shared with the SPRC. These will strengthen our ability to manage the church operations and personnel.

I know my unexpected and sudden administrative leave caused a lot of disruption in the church. I sincerely apologize for that.

Many people stepped up and filled in the gaps while I was on leave. This is the nature of a family who loves and cares for one another. Just as our biological families have rough patches in loving each other, so do church families. When we need each other, however, we show up and do what's necessary to carry on the work of God's ministries. Thank you to all who stepped up!!

We, as a congregation, are going through a difficult time. There is a continuing need for healing from old and new wounds, one of which I helped to create on June 23. While we heal from these wounds, we must seek the Lord's guidance on how God wants to use us to spread the love of Christ in the Upper keys. God has called us and equipped us for this, and we will go through this difficult time with God's peace.

Psalm 46: 1-7 talks of God's peace. It says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

This psalm speaks of a river running through Jerusalem. What's interesting is that there is no river that runs through Jerusalem. The psalm is using a river as a symbol of the life-giving presence of God. We see this symbolic use of rivers in Genesis where a river runs through the Garden of Eden and we see it again in Ezekiel's vision of the temple. In Revelation, a river runs from Jerusalem in the

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new heaven and the new earth. In all these images, a river stands for the life-giving presence of God.

There is a river running through Burton Memorial United Methodist Church. We can read Psalm 46:4 like this: There is a river whose streams make glad Burton Memorial United Methodist Church, the holy place where the Most High dwells.” This river, symbolizing the presence of God, gives us peace.

Our Savior & Lord, Jesus, speaks of this peace. In John 16:33 he told his apostles, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

This peace, promised by Jesus, is a calmness in our hearts. When times are tough, and we become worried, agitated, or angry, we can receive this peace. One way to do that is to simply close our eyes, take deep breaths, and, with every exhale, say ‘Jesus’. Do this until you experience that calmness in your heart. It may take a while, just be patient. Because of what I did on June 23, I’ve had to do this on numerous occasions.

This peace makes it possible for us to calmly, prayerfully, and rationally think about the loving and just course of action we ought to take in whatever situation we find ourselves in. With this peace, we can discern how God wants to use us to spread the love of Christ in the Upper Keys.

As God’s peace softens our hearts, I believe Jesus will show us how he wants to use us to spread his love. For example, he may lead us to use the Child Development Center to introduce more families to Jesus. I have some ideas on this and am eager to explore your ideas for growing our family.

Again, I apologize for messing up on June 23 and the ensuing consequences. Before I came here, this congregation showed an amazing ability to carry on through difficult times. Times that resulted in power struggles, hurts, and major loss of members. I cannot predict what the future holds, but I do know that we can go through the future with God’s peace. As we partake of holy communion, we will receive God’s peace. Please join me in Holy Communion.

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- I. I am very glad that my administrative leave is over.
 - A. Donna and I are extremely happy to rejoin you in our efforts to spread the love of Jesus.
 - B. However, before we do that, I should give you an explanation as to why my administrative leave was required.
 - You deserve that.
- II. Why my administrative leave was required
 - A. On June 23, 2025, I messed up.
 - Although I did not come anywhere near physically hurting anyone, I did lose my cool.
 - While talking with an individual, the individual became irritated and hastily walked away from me and made a hurtful comment.
 - I followed this person to talk with this person about the hurtful comment.
 - When this person again started walking away, I touched this person with open hands on the upper arm/shoulder to let the person know I wanted to continue the conversation.
 - At this point I was yelling at this person to let the person know that I wanted to continue the conversation.
 - When this person continued to walk away towards the fellowship hall doors, I placed myself between this person and the doors and banged on one of the doors out of frustration.
 - This person then easily exited the building.
 - So, out of a spontaneous outburst of frustration, I did 4 things:
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 - I yelled,
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B. This outburst is way outside my normal behavior.

- On that same day, I took it upon myself to seek counseling as a way of looking inside myself to figure out why I behaved in such an unusual manner.
- My latest counseling session was last Friday.

C. Also, on that same day, I contacted...

- Marshall, our SPRC Chairperson, and our former District Superintendent, Simon Osunlana.
- When Simon’s successor, Vidales Lopez, began her tenure as District Superintendent on July 1, 2025, I contacted her as well.
 - You all met Pastor Vidalis on July 20, 2025 when she announced my administrative leave.

D. During the administrative leave, I went through what is called a complaint process in accordance with the United Methodist Book of Discipline.

- The purpose of this process was to develop a just resolution to help bring about reconciliation and develop measures to prevent a repeat of the behavior.
- I went through this process with DS Vidalis, Assistant to the Bishop Alex Shanks, and Pastor Steve Hart, who acted as my clergy support person.
- The just resolution resulted in six requirements of myself and church leadership, which I have shared with the SPRC.
 - These will strengthen our ability to manage the church operations and personnel.

E. I know my unexpected and sudden administrative leave caused a lot of disruption in the church.

- I sincerely apologize for that.

F. Many people stepped up and filled in the gaps while I was on leave.

- This is the nature of a family who loves and cares for one another.

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- Just as our biological families have rough patches in loving each other, so do church families.
- When we need each other, however, we show up and do what’s necessary to carry on the work of God’s ministries.
- Thank you to all who stepped up!!

III. We, as a congregation, are going through a difficult time.

- A. There is a continuing need for healing from old and new wounds, one of which I helped to create on June 23.
- B. While we heal from these wounds, we must seek the Lord’s guidance on how God wants to use us to spread the love of Christ in the Upper keys.
- C. God has called us and equipped us for this, and we will go through this difficult time with God’s peace.

IV. Psalm 46: 1-7 talks of God’s peace.

- A. It says, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

B. This psalm speaks of a river running through Jerusalem.

- What’s interesting is that there is no river that runs through Jerusalem.
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- In Revelation, a river runs from Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth.
- In all these images, a river stands for the life-giving presence of God.

C. There is a river running through Burton Memorial United Methodist Church.

- We can read Psalm 46:4 like this: There is a river whose streams make glad Burton Memorial United Methodist Church, the holy place where the Most High dwells.”
- This river, symbolizing the presence of God, gives us peace.

V. Our Savior & Lord, Jesus, speaks of this peace.

A. In John 16:33 he told his apostles, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

B. This peace, promised by Jesus, is a calmness in our hearts.

- When times are tough, and we become worried, agitated, or angry, we can receive this peace.
- One way to do that is to simply close our eyes, take deep breaths, and, with every exhale, say ‘Jesus’.
 - Do this until you experience that calmness in your heart.
 - It may take a while, just be patient.
 - Because of what I did on June 23, I’ve had to do this on numerous occasions.

VI. This peace makes it possible for us to calmly, prayerfully, and rationally think about the loving and just course of action we ought to take in whatever situation we find ourselves in.

A. With this peace, we can discern how God wants to use us to spread the love of Christ in the Upper Keys.

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- B. As God’s peace softens our hearts, I believe Jesus will show us how he wants to use us to spread his love.
- For example, he may lead us to use the Child Development Center to introduce more families to Jesus.
 - I have some ideas on this and am eager to explore your ideas for growing our family.
- VII. Again, I apologize for messing up on June 23 and the ensuing consequences.
- A. Before I came here, this congregation showed an amazing ability to carry on through difficult times.
- B. Times that resulted in power struggles, hurts, and major loss of members.
- C. I cannot predict what the future holds, but I do know that we can go through the future with God’s peace.
- D. As we partake of holy communion, we will receive God’s peace.
- Please join me in Holy Communion.