

From Our Conference Minister



Find Rest in God! (Matthew 11:25-30)

"We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"

Since we just celebrated the 4th of July, we know these familiar words from the Declaration of Independence. Many of our men and women have died and continue to give their lives to protect life, liberty and

pursuit of happiness.

Freedom is cherished in our democracy. However, as we go through life, there are burdens that weigh us down and rob us of the experience of feeling truly free.

A few years ago William H. Willimon, a UMC theologian, questioned the quality of freedom. He predicted that *"our age shall be known, not as the age of freedom, but as the age of anxiety. We are anxious about many things: having enough money, having good enough health, and being secure and safe."* As baby boomers age, the whole country seems worried about how their declining health will affect their future. We have become a nation filled with stress.

The American Psychological Association reported on stress in an October 2007 study. The results showed that close to 50% of the 2000 people surveyed said they'd lost sleep and engaged unhealthy behaviors during the last month due to stress. The research also showed that some people used

healthy coping behaviors like *listening to music* (54 percent), *reading* (52 percent), *exercising or walking* (50 percent), *spending time with family and friends* (40 percent) and ***praying*** (34 percent). It was interesting to note that fewest people turned to praying, only 34%.

With all the crisis in our communities and world that swirls around us, perhaps we have stopped turning to God in prayer because we think God has abandoned us. A similar sentiment was expressed on a church sign I saw recently which read, "If God seems distant -- who moved?"

Maybe our vision of God has dimmed in ways that make it difficult to see God at work in our lives and our church. So, hear anew Jesus' invitation found in Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message translation):

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

God wants to help us to live *freely and lightly*, through learning *the unforced rhythms* of God's grace, in Christ Jesus. Christ's yoke connects us in close relationship with him. Tethered by his grace, Jesus leads us to *real rest* as individuals and into covenantal relationship, as the body of Christ.

Indeed, this is good news! Amen.

In Christ,

Monica

Rev. Dr. Monica Dawkins-Smith
Conference Minister and President