

APRIL 26, 2026

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON "Windows of Opportunity" Jeremiah 25:1-7, Judges 7:19-24, Genesis 4:6-7*

The idea of windows of opportunity is incredibly important, especially today. The world changes fast, opportunities come and go, and sometimes lives and institutions rise and fall based on whether or not they act on those opportunities as they arise.

When we talk about this idea of a "window" we're talking about a span of time during which an opportunity is available. Eventually that time span runs out and the opportunity vanishes. Sometimes it might open up down the road again. Other times it's one and done.

When I was in Clarks Green we had one such situation. A preschool had been looking for space to rent. Another church had been dragging the along for over a year. They started looking elsewhere. We saw two talented ladies with a vision and in short order approved their request. Next thing you know we had an extra \$1200 a month coming in and all we had to do was unlock the doors. They even improved the facility on their own dime for their program.

Windows open. Windows close. And we don't often don't know how long that window will remain open in the moment.

Scripturally Hebrews talks about "while it's still called 'today'" to encourage one another so we don't get discouraged. In other words don't miss out on that window of opportunity to build one another up. Scripture talks about "seasons" of life as well as seasons of the year. All of these are windows of opportunity to accomplish something. Precisely what differs from person to person and group to group.

There are also stories aplenty illustrating this for us.

Gideon is a perfect story for this. He was a Judge over Israel and was tasked with defeating the Midianites. As he answered God's call he engaged one of my favorite sorting methods. As he amassed an army God kept telling him it was too big. God wanted them to be certain that it was the power of God and not their own that would bring the victory.

To sort out the men he had them go down to the water and take a drink. The ones who knelt and put their face in the water were dismissed. The ones who cupped the water in their hands and brought it to their mouths were chosen. The notion is that those fellows must have had more sense than the others. Rather than expose themselves and become vulnerable by having their eyes distracted those the cupped the water could stay alert as they drank.

Gideon was given a window of opportunity. "At this time, when the enemy is camped here, surround them. Break open jars with the lit torches in them and blow your horns." How long would the Midianites be in their camp? We don't know. What we do know is that Gideon was given the window of a night to carry out the plan.

When he did and the men followed their instructions the Midianites panicked, turned on each other in the dark and started fighting and killing one another. They did most of the work for Gideon and his men making it much easier for them to then claim the victory.

Another example is the story of Cain. After his offering was rejected by God and his brother Abel's accepted he was jealous and angry. God pulls Cain aside and tries to get Cain to open up about his anger. He warns him about the potential to be overcome by sin. In this moment and the moments between then and seeing Abel again Cain had a window of opportunity.

He had the opportunity to talk to God, literally. He had the opportunity to think through what God had said and let his heart be changed. We don't know exactly how much time passed between the conversation with God and the murder of his brother. What we do know is that this window was wasted.

The result was his banishment and to forever be known as the first murderer in creation.

On a more positive note we have the story of Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah knew his window, it was three days. I don't know that the Ninevites did. When Jonah preached through the city that judgment was coming the King ordered the people to repent and change. This brief window of opportunity is what made the difference in their destruction or salvation. They seized that opportunity and were spared.

Jeremiah demonstrates a ridiculously long window of opportunity. 23 years! For 23 years God sent prophets to get Judah to change their ways. They never did. This is the amazing patience of God that was squandered by the people. The result was their destruction and exile to Babylon.

They wasted all that time continuing to mistreat and abuse one another. If they had listened perhaps they would have been spared. Indeed their behavior is the downfall of any nation that indulges it year after year. They treated one another unjustly, cheated one another, abused each other, and lacked compassion on one another.

This is a society eating itself alive from within. Enemy nations just had to sit back and watch while they did the work of weakening themselves all on their own. Then, when the moment is right strike and that's the end of things.

In Cain's case that window may have been mere moments. This is instructive. We need to have our hearts prepared to make these choices in a moment sometimes. If we're not we may make a mistake. We may pass up the chance. We may not even see it at all!

In Judah's case that window may have been too long. After a time the threat of consequence can ring hollow. "It hasn't happened yet, maybe it never will" and people get lazy. In those cases when the bill comes due it's too late.

One of the great cliches and lies we hear is that when a door closes God opens a window. Sometimes this happens. Other times it doesn't. Sometimes it's our responsibility, others it's bad luck.

I caution us not to backpedal on this by saying, well SOME opportunity will open. Of course it does. Life is nothing but big and small opportunities in every moment to choose and do. But the spirit of that statement is to imagine that something better is always waiting next. Not always.

In fact, sometimes it's ourselves that ensure the windows don't open when the door closes.

Look at the house in your bulletin and pull out a pencil or pen. Let's look at this in the scope of Judah.

Write "Justice" next to one window, "Mercy" next to the other, and "Integrity" next to that little one on the pitch of the roof.

Let's say that after 5 years Judah demonstrates that they refuse to have integrity with one another. Black that window out.

Now another 10 and they refuse to show mercy to one another and are given to cruelty and harshness. Black that one out.

Let's go another 5 and justice continues to be thwarted. The innocent are punished and the guilty get away free. Black that one out.

What's happening in that house? Now there's no more opportunity. And it's not because God wanted it that way. They themselves eliminated opportunity by opportunity those things that might have provided them relief or escape from the consequences.

On the other hand as with Nineveh and Gideon, they could have kept those windows free and clear. In the end they might have been victorious. They would have been spared.

It's not different for the rest of us.

Every day has opportunity on opportunity. Every interaction is an opportunity to spread love and joy. Every need an opportunity to show kindness and compassion. Every Sunday you see people you know well and people you don't know well at all. Believe it or not in a congregation that has the beautiful, wonderful history that so many of you do with one another. Literally going back entire lifetimes of history. It's hard to feel like the fellowship is able to break into. Every Sunday seeing each other is an opportunity to go beyond the pleasant "hellos" and "welcomes".

It's an opportunity to ask one another about your lives, your work, your family. To maybe invite someone to lunch or dinner that you don't know well. To build and forge relationships that are new and vibrant.

Do we seize these opportunities or let them pass by? Do we take the opportunity to invite people into our community?

2 Thursdays ago I went to a social event that was held in a tattoo parlor. I wore my clergy collar. You would, or maybe wouldn't, be amazed to hear how many of the people there had been pushed out and dismissed by churches and church people. How do we reach them if we don't take those opportunities?

What windows are open in your life right now? There's always multiple at any given time. As we've seen, every moment is one. What is the opportunity in it? Other times it's larger and more complicated and incredibly specific to you and your own circumstances. What is God trying to do through it?

For our congregation we are in a window of opportunity right now as well. If you see empty spaces in these pews each and every one of those is an opportunity. Who will fill it? In these moments sometimes we have to go looking for the opportunity. We have to go looking in new places and, naturally, with new people.

Windows of opportunity also push us to uncomfortable, unfamiliar places. It's also usually in those places we discover the most wonderful things about ourselves and each other. That's kind of how God works.

It was uncomfortable for Gideon to push the envelope with his men the way he did and stand before a much

larger force. It was uncomfortable for the King of Nineveh to push his people to change on the word of a stranger named Jonah. It was uncomfortable for Jesus to set aside His power, His authority, and His very life to go to the cross for us.

Yet each of those places the window was open. The time was right. And seizing the opportunity gave life and a future to their people. Including all of humanity.

## BIBLE STUDY 1 Timothy 2

This is an extremely short chapter. That said it holds some substantial material for our present time. The first half is a calling and inspiration. They are to pray for everyone and invite everyone. Not some. No conditions. All. Included in the instruction to “pray for” is kings. Remember that this was a time of persecution of the church. Roman rulers could torture and execute Christians for their faith. To pray for the pinnacle of this is a tall order. Nevertheless the grace and mercy of Christ is called to reign in their hearts. Pray for all. Invite all.

Today this is an important message. Amidst so much division, anger, and hate, even preached from “Christian” pulpits, we should be reminded that we are to pray for and invite everyone. ESPECIALLY those we call “enemy” or strongly dislike. The answer is never defeat and submission of the other, it is transformation into a heart that reflects Jesus.

Which moves us on in the chapter. While the invitation is limitlessly broad, the object of worship is very specific. That object is Jesus. Plain and simple. The writer amplifies this by asserting his calling and mission. He is the apostle (a tremendous call) to the Gentiles (a specific people). This mission to the Gentiles frames up the last half of the chapter.

Without getting terribly involved this part of 1 Timothy is used to suppress women even today. They are told what to wear, how to act, to shut up, and to defer to men in all matters. Women get subjugated, abused, dismissed, ignored, and much more from a shallow grasp of this passage.

First, here are a few factors to keep in mind in terms of “modesty”. Men are just as guilty of showing off. In terms of dress allow me to offer my thoughts on many Christian summer camps.

The girls are forced to cover up. There are stories on stories of girls being called in to camp offices and told to either leave or be more “modest” in their dress. And these instances are because ADULT men complain that they are being “tempted” by 11 and 12 year old girls.

This isn't a problem with the kids. It's a problem with the adults. And frankly when Christianity paints men as so lecherous that they can't handle an 11 year old girl in a bathing suit or a t-shirt I take issue. It's not the problem of the girl because I'm not that kind of man nor are most that I know. We have control, respect, and a sense of responsibility.

To put it further the boys run around half naked without any rule or restraint. If modesty is the issue, get the boys to cover up as well. We've learned that girls can be just as drawn in by the physique of boys as boys are to girls. The double standard is mind-boggling.

While it might harken to these verses for those who enforce it, it's nonsense. It isn't reading things properly.

Having women “be silent” and “not teach” is also a thing of the past. We know it's nonsense. Yet there are still many Christians who can't handle a female teacher or pastor. They cite these verses.

In some cases the allowance is convenience. Not enough men are stepping up so they allow women. Not surprisingly, they often find women to be just as capable as men. They do a wonderful job of teaching, instructing, and leading.

In some cases the allowance is letting God open hearts to the reality that the Holy Spirit speaks through everyone, male and female. So we embrace it and get better because of it.

If we're being honest, the reasoning given for this in terms of subordination is cherry picking. The writer chooses the creation story of Genesis 2 where female comes from male. What the writer ignores is Genesis 1 where male and female are created simultaneously. Neither is first or second. Convenience is a funny thing for justification.

The other conflict is with other letters of Paul. Paul refers to female apostles and supports women prophesying. These are leading and teaching roles. Is Paul disagreeing with himself?

Here is where we get into some details. One answer is that scholars are correct disputing the authoring of this letter. It may not have been Paul himself. Even if it is Paul, here are some other senses to take into play.

The background of this church in Ephesus has some wealthy women in the congregation. The warnings against extra hoity toity dress isn't about the modesty we talk about at a swimming pool (though I agree with modesty for both genders in that arena). It's about showing off status, money, and influence. Doing this belittles others and is trying to get them to knuckle under to influence. The rich are trying to control the spiritual narrative of the congregation.

This isn't going to stand. Timothy is trying to get this church in order. He can't have folks swinging around their money to control and compromise the message. In chapter 1 this is the whole point, to help Timothy squelch problematic messaging. How do we stop the troublemakers? Tell them they can't display their wealth and status. If the main troublemakers are women, dial it in further to target the problem audience.

In addition to this there is the cultural problem. This time and era, like it or not, the man ruled the roost. In the home the man was the unquestioned head and everyone else was to fall into line. In Acts we see the statement to a male head of household "believe on Jesus and you will be saved AND your house." Why? Because what the man believed the rest of the house fell into line. It was a very male controlled world.

Churches at that time were held in homes. Now we have a crossover. Two structures competing. The societal home was man at the head beyond question. Even if the religious sense was more equal, to put that into the worship subverts the culture's expectation of a household.

Timothy is in a Gentile population. The church is persecuted. How does he navigate this? Does he push something that will cause upheaval in the households of the believers or does he call the church to keep culture's expectations to keep the church safe and thriving?

At least here it would seem that the answer is to bend to the culture.

Grasping this reality is helpful. If these restrictions are culturally based, we can allow cultural movement to open things up. Culture has moved on things like slavery wildly. Scripture endorses slavery over and over. Yet we believe it to be wrong. Culture has allowed us to see things more clearly. Same thing with the role of women. It wasn't God pushing down on them, it was culture.

Something to consider is this process. Most of us have moved on slavery and the role of women in church. We've done it through study, reflection, necessity, honesty, and faithfully looking at scripture itself. If we can honor movement in understanding scripture here, why do we still dig in so hard on looking at other passages literally and without any desire to understand them deeper? Often it's about how something affects us personally, but that's not a reliable measure for discerning scripture.

Take the time to study, discuss, and discern. In the case of 1 Timothy 2 we see that superficial readings have shown wrong and problematic for women, children, and ultimately all of us through history. Clearly women have and do have a vital role in the life and ministry of the church. They counsel and instruct men well. They lead. They represent Christ.