

WHY REVIVAL TARRIES
Pentecost – May 23, 2010 – Joel 2: 1-2 and 15-17
The Church of the Covenant

Why does revival tarry? Let me first define “revival”. It is like that first Pentecost except it happens in the here and now; the Holy Spirit again comes like the rush of a mighty wind; the people are convicted of their sin and they turn and repent and they turn toward God; they want to spend time with God. In Brian H. Edwards’ book, entitled “Revival: a People Saturated with God” he notes over and over again in the history of revivals in this country that people would stay at the church 3 days, 4 days, 7 days and still could not get enough God. Today, by contrast, we have the car running in the parking lot and its not a good Sunday when the preacher goes on a little too long and the service goes over even 5 minutes! But it is also Holy Ghost preaching that is going on; the reason people stay so long is that it isn’t the preacher preaching, it is God preaching. People’s lives are changed and transformed; the church is full; the community comes and takes notice. We in the Presbyterian Church have a slightly more polite name for this; we call it “spiritual renewal” but it is really the very same thing.

We do not even know what it looks like or feels like, it has been so long since it has come. No one alive today has experienced it. The most Holy Roller church has not experienced full fledged revival. What masquerades as success in the American Church, the large mega church, is not revival. If we wanted to pray for revival we wouldn’t even know what to pray for today.

I have been praying for this time of spiritual refreshment for Pittsburgh for more than 15 years now, every day I ask the Lord to send the Holy Spirit in a new time of new Pentecost for His church and for this area. I went down to Washington, DC two years ago for an event billed as a “solemn assembly” and it had nothing to do with the scripture models; the playbook that the Lord has set out for us in scripture. What I got was a Christian Rock Concert, not a time of humbling ourselves in the presence of God; noise, not prayer; babble, not silence; nothing at all sacred or solemn about that assembly. By the way, did you know that the Presbyterian Church originally modeled the General Assembly on the Solemn Assembly in the Old Testament? Don’t even get me started on that one. That which was to be a time of spiritual refreshment for the denomination has just been turned into one giant business meeting.

So why has revival tarried? Why has it been more than 100 years since the Holy Spirit has fallen in power on the American Church? Why is it that only our most long term members can remember the period of time immediately following the revivals of 100 years ago –the hymns sung, the churches full, and our nation a godly and God-centered nation? Why is it that the churches are declining? Why is it that our nation is in the midst of a deep spiritual malaise? Why is it that as a nation we are besieged from without? Why is it that our economy is going down the tubes? Why is it? Because revival has tarried. Because we are not in Edwards’ phrase “a people saturated with God”. Because the spiritual rain of the living water of the Holy Spirit has not come and the Lord has shut up the heavens. We are a parched and a spiritually weary land. Why? Because revival tarries...

There are Old Testament descriptions of revival and there are New Testament descriptions. Our scripture lesson from the Book of Joel describes one. The heavens are shut up and it hasn’t rained in a long time so the people of God are experiencing drought –drought for their fields, to be sure, but more importantly a spiritual drought in their souls. They are far from God. The prophet Joel calls a Solemn Assembly, says “*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain!*” (Joel 2: 1); the prophet Joel declares “*Blow the trumpet in Zion...call a solemn assembly; gather the people, sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders, gather the children.*” (v. 15) All of the people are gathered, from the

greatest to the least, from the oldest to the youngest. And *"the ministers of the Lord"*, as it says. **"WEEP"**, and says, *"Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach...among the nations."* (v. 17) And large portions of scripture are read to the assembled crowds; and the people hear how their lives have fallen short; they are cut to the heart; they weep and repent; they amend their lives; the Spirit of the Living God comes; and the right relationship between God and God's people is restored. And God again blesses the land. Only revival, only spiritual renewal, only the Spirit of the Living God fallen like Pentecost can revive our nation. That is what 15 years of praying and careful study of the scriptures has spoken to me...

Pentecost, by the way, when you read about it there in the second chapter of Acts, Pentecost is just a New Testament example of an Old Testament Solemn Assembly...Second chapter of Joel is the same thing as the second chapter of Acts...The church of Jesus Christ began when the Holy Spirit fell on the people that first Pentecost; the church of Jesus Christ begins again when the Holy Spirit comes in times of spiritual renewal and revival...

Do you know why there are so many Presbyterian Churches in our area? Do you know why on almost every hill out there in the countryside there is another Presbyterian brick meeting style church? Because in the early 1800's revival came to Washington County; in all of Western PA it began here. A friend has given me a book, written in 1881, entitled *"The Centennial Celebration of the Organization of Washington, County"* and in it is a chapter on *"The Religious History"* written by the Reverend I. N. Hays, a Presbyterian minister. Let me read just a small portion of the account of what happened to the Presbyterian Church in a Pentecost moment in the early 1800's.

*"At Cross Roads (Presbyterian) on the last Sabbath of October, the crowd was so great, that on Sabbath morn two sermons were preached, one in the house and the other in the tent, and no less than 800 communicants were served; and although the people were without shelter, and all the preceding night and the whole of the Sabbath the rain and snow were falling...the people remained undisturbed...that on the following Monday no less than three ministers officiated...At Upper Buffalo, two weeks later, the interest was still greater. People came from great distances on foot and horse back and in wagons, bringing their provisions with them. No less than 15 ministers were present, 950 communed and it was supposed that **no less than 10,000 persons were on the grounds**, all deeply interested; and from scores and hundreds the cry was going up, *"What must I do to be saved?"* Beloved, it is the same question asked at that very first Pentecost (Acts 2: 37) This is our heritage; this is who we are; these are the Presbyterians who are our forebears; in a county that perhaps had 25,000 people 10,000 of them came and experienced a solemn assembly and a second Pentecost and the Presbyterian Church was born and reborn. What would that look like, what would that feel like today? How would that revivify the church? What impact would that have in the community? Change a man's heart and you change the church; transform the heart of the church and you transform the nation.*

Why has revival tarried? I have seen the enemy and it is I. I am the problem; I am the heavy stone sitting on the deep well of the Spirit. I and the ministers, who are supposed to get us to God, who are supposed to know our scriptures, who are supposed to speak, I have remained silent. I've always been blessed by serving wonderful churches just like The Church of the Covenant. They are growing; they are healthy; their finances are good; people are happy. It is a taste of the Spirit's work but it is not Pentecost. And I would sort of stand over and against the rest of the churches, with a smug, ego suffused attitude, and would fold my arms and wag my head, and tut-tut-tut, and think to myself, *"If the rest of these ministers and churches would just be as I am, believe as I believe, and do as I do, then what a great church it would be."* See, that attitude is precisely the problem; everyone thinks they have it

figured out. But they don't. We think we know; we don't know. Only God knows. It is why elsewhere in scripture, in the Book of I Peter it says, "*Judgment begins with the household of God*" (I Peter 4: 17) Judgment begins with us in a time of repentance, for not having the church be as spiritually strong as the one we inherited, for thinking we have it all figured out when indeed we have nothing figured out, for accepting the foretaste of the Spirit without wanting its fullness, for being the ones who are the repository of the knowledge of how people and societies are revived, but not being willing to hold out for it. We accept a little breeze, instead of the rush of a mighty wind. We accept a little stream, instead of the torrent of the living waters of the Spirit. Be done with the large mega church. Be done with all the church self help books. Be done with ever thinking we can get it right where the scriptures are concerned without first getting our heart right in relation to God. Be done with our plans and accept God's plan. Be done with all the things that are less than the very thing that is the most needful.

Blow the trumpet in Zion! Call a solemn assembly! Assemble for prayer in an upper room. Wait upon the Lord in prayer. Assemble the people. Assemble the elders. Assemble the families and the children. Ministers, weep at how far we have fallen short in our glorious task. Read the scriptures and the way God revives a people and a nation. Cry out before HIM, "What then shall we do?", "What then shall we do?", "What then shall we do?"

Until we do, revival will tarry, and the nation will continue to slip toward the dark abyss reserved for every nation who turns their back on God.

If revival came to the Presbyterians in Upper Buffalo more than 200 years ago –why cannot it come again in our day????

Amen.

I am deeply grateful for the example and faithful witness of Dr. Henry Blackaby who has inspired me on the issue of revival and from whom I have adopted this sermon title, "Why Revival Tarryes". I am deeply grateful to Mr. Ernie Fredericks, who inspired me to pray daily for Pittsburgh and for revival.

**By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!**