

May 19, 2013  
Pentecost 2013

*Is Revival Still Possible?*  
Acts 2:1-13

**Opening words:** In the Old Testament-dominated world, the fiftieth day after Passover was called Pentecost. It was also called the Feast of Weeks (Deuteronomy 16:10) or the Feast of the Harvest (Exodus 23:16). It was comparable to our Thanksgiving Day. The church will always remember Pentecost as the day God unleashed the Holy Spirit on the world. The Divine Helper was not created on that day. He existed in former days, but was only experienced by political or religious leaders. Suddenly, he was available to every believer. The church was born and the rest is history. The traditional scripture reading on this day is our scripture reading for today, Acts 2:1-13. Let me call this message *Is Revival Still Possible?*

---

**Acts 2:1-13** <sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. <sup>5</sup> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. <sup>7</sup> Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" <sup>12</sup> Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

---

How well do you know your American history? Forty years before the American Revolution the church in our land was really nothing more than an extension of the European church. Worship was liturgically heavy and sermons were theologically dense. The church became very academic. The goal was to get everyone to think about God. Encounters with God were very rare. However, there was a group within the clergy who were dissatisfied with that kind of church. That group was lead by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. They prayed that God would do something new in their land. God did and there was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that changed the American church forever. The goal of the church was no longer intellectual. The goal was salvation! Critics called it emotionalism; supporters called it spiritual. Historians call it America's Great Awakening. I can't really explain what happened. God does not always work in explainable ways. How do you explain a revival that lasted forty years? Those must have been exciting times.

Does anyone here think it is time for a revival again? Without revival, the America we have known in the past is not going to survive in the future. Without revival, the American church we love is going to die. I am not just talking about the mainline Protestant church. I am talking about all churches, Roman Catholic and Orthodox. The church that will survive does not resemble us at all. Without revival, fewer and fewer people will go to church. Without the church, there will be no more theology taught. Our understanding of God will distill down to personal opinions. Without the church, America will lose her moral compass. You know it is true. How many things are accepted today that used to be ruled as immoral? Without the church, the non-profit organizations that were designed to help our community will die. Most of their money comes from the local congregations. Without those congregations, the money will stop coming. Without money, no organization can exist. If there has ever been a time when a revival is needed, it is now! I would be shocked if a single person in this room would vote against revival. That takes us to the question for today. Is revival still possible? The answer is YES! That takes us to this morning's scripture lesson.

Our scripture lesson for today is traditional in nature. We read it annually on Pentecost Sunday. So the background information may sound familiar. It has been fifty days since Jesus was resurrected. It has been ten days since Jesus ascended into heaven. They must have wrestled with Jesus' last words about evangelizing the world. However, they also did what Jesus said. They stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). They waited for something to happen, and on the day of Pentecost it did. While the rest of their world was celebrating the harvest, Jesus kept his promise. Without warning, the Holy Spirit blew into the disciples' lives and everything changed. They were transformed. They did not change physically; they changed spiritually. The lessons they wrestled with in the past suddenly became clear. They were able to do things that seemed impossible moments earlier. The words printed in your Bible are unable to capture the events of that day. The first revival in the history of the world had begun and the church was born.

Today, I want to talk about two reasons why our generation is not experiencing revival. The problem is not God. He is always willing to send the divine helper. The problem is us. I want to warn you now. My words are going to sound critical. However, my words are also sincere. There are times when we need to hear the truth. First, revival will never happen in the life of the church as long as there are mixed-up priorities in the life of the church. God in Jesus Christ must be number one. Second, revival will never happen in the life of the church as long as we are fractured. The church must be united. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

### **Priorities**

I love this story. That great missionary to India, William Carey, became deeply concerned about the attitude of his son Felix. The young man, a professing Christian, had promised to become a missionary. But he broke his vow when he was appointed ambassador to Burma. Carey requested prayer for him: "Pray for Felix."

He has degenerated into an ambassador of the British government when he should be serving the King of kings." Can anyone here question William Carey's priorities? What is your top priority in life? How high on your list of priorities is God?

There are few churches worse at starting new congregations than the East Ohio Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. We haven't had a truly successful church start in a long time. That is important because churches have a lifeline like people. Like people, congregations are born and congregations die. How many churches do you know that are near the end of their life? How far along the lifeline is Western Reserve? Let me give you three reasons why we have failed. First, we have not failed because there are too many churches. Other denominations have purchased old Methodist buildings and have started successful ministries. Second, we have not failed because of a lack of money. We have spent more money on failed new congregations than I care to admit. Third, we have not failed because of ignorance. We have a mountain of demographic information. So why have we failed? I believe we have failed in new church starts because of a lack of priorities. Generally, we fail at new church starts because of the wrong motivation. We are more concerned with keeping Methodism alive than we are with making disciples for Jesus Christ. We are more concerned with creating giving units for the pension program and our self-funded hospitalization plan than we are making disciples for Jesus Christ. You shouldn't be surprised. We have mixed-up priorities here at Western Reserve.

When you came to church today what was your greatest priority? Is your greatest priority funding the budget? Is your greatest priority a certain style of worship? Is your greatest priority a certain style or quality of music? Is your priority the annual mission trip or a Sunday School class? Is your priority a clean kitchen or a weed-free Woodland Haven? Is your priority visiting with your friends? I know those things have to happen. However, they are never going to happen until we experience God. It is all a matter of priority. Generally, your priorities at church are the same priorities you have at home. Can anyone here tell me your greatest priority at home is God?

If you want revival to break out, then you must evaluate your priorities. With all the shortcomings of the disciples, no one can question their desire to experience God. They traveled with Jesus for three years. They saw the miracles; they felt the power. It was great and they wanted to have that experience again. Is there someone here who would like to experience God? I don't know why you wouldn't want to experience Him. What I really want is God! It can happen once we experience revival. However, revival will never come as long as we have mixed-up priorities. God must be your top priority! Gandhi once said, "*Actions express priorities.*" How much time do you spend with God? If you want to experience God, say, "**Amen!**" If you want to experience revival, then you must have God as your top priority. If you want to experience revival then we must have a sense of unity.

## Unity

During World War II, Hitler commanded all religious groups to unite so that he could control them. Among the Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who went along with the order had a much easier time. Those who did not faced harsh persecution. In almost every family of those who resisted, someone died in a concentration camp. When the war was over, feelings of bitterness ran deep between the groups and there was much tension. Finally they decided that the situation had to be healed. Leaders from each group met at a quiet retreat. For several days, each person spent time in prayer, examining his own heart in the light of Christ's commands. Then they came together. Francis Schaeffer, who told of the incident, asked a friend who was there, "What did you do then?" "We were just one," he replied. As they confessed their hostility and bitterness to God and yielded to His control, the Holy Spirit created a spirit of unity among them. Love filled their hearts and dissolved their hatred.

Nearly nine years ago, John Hopkins was appointed to be the Resident Bishop of the East Ohio Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. That means he is our bishop. One of the problems he recognized in East Ohio was isolationism. He was concerned by the fact that the clergy didn't know each other. To combat that problem, he assigned each parish to a Compass group. District churches of the same size were told to meet regularly. The goal was two-fold. First, clergy were to get to know each other better so they would support one another. Second, we were to share new ideas about ministry. We are in a group with Canfield, Boardman, Poland, Berlin Center, Salem and Warren First. Compass groups worked partially, but not completely. I have gotten to know my colleagues, but no new ideas have been generated. The reason is, preachers are territorial. I am passionate about Western Reserve. I am only interested in other congregations. I am saving my best for you. I am not alone. That is why the nearly 800 churches of the East Ohio Annual Conference do ministry alone. Competition is built right into the system.

Do you know the most difficult thing about my job? It is not preaching three times each week. It is not going to the hospital or nursing home. It is not attending meetings or going to Annual Conference. The most difficult thing about my job is being a referee. How many times have I had to defend the actions of one group to another group within the church? Can I tell you the truth? I like each person in the congregation and I value each ministry. I try to defend them all. However, I feel like I am alone. Most groups don't trust those other groups. Most people are afraid to try something new because "they" won't like it. Someday I am going to find out who "they" are.

Just think of the natural competitions that exist within our congregation. There is traditional versus contemporary worship. That brings us to the music wars. What is more important to you, performance or sincerity? What do you prefer, organ or piano? There is Daughters of God, Circle of Friends and Susannah Circle. Have you noticed there is always tension around the kitchen? That is because so many groups use the kitchen. Everyone thinks the kitchen here should be like their kitchen at home.

That leads to another question. How clean is your kitchen at home? How many weeds could I find in your yard? What is your opinion about Woodland Haven? There is the tension between the church and the day care. There is the tension between the church and the various groups that use our building. What about those retired nurses? Is there anyone here who does not trust the Boy Scouts? What about the Finance Committee and the Trustees? Who do they think they are? Couldn't we use that Helping Hand room for another Sunday School class? Do I have to go on? Do I really have to go on? You know it is true. There is a tension in our church. We are too big to know everyone and we are too small-minded to be run like a business. It is a difficult situation for me because I am more of a pastor than I am a leader. I care about how you feel. How do you feel about these groups?

The Holy Spirit brought unity to that little group of believers. When the world looks at us, do they see unity? Do they see disunity? How many factions exist with this church? J.K. Rowling of Harry Potter fame once said, *"We are only as strong as we are united, as weak as we are divided."* How united are we? If you want revival to break out, then you must evaluate our unity. If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

Is revival still possible? Do you think that revival could happen again? The answer is YES! It must have been great to be a preacher during the Great Awakening. The Holy Spirit was moving and God was changing America. Listen to what I am about say. The revival that began in 1730 was not the last revival. Christian historians tell us America has experienced revival several times. There was the revival of 1790. There was the revival of 1830 and 1857. There was the revival of 1882 and 1904. How many of you remember the revival of 1930? How many of you remember the revival of 1970? They were called "Jesus Freaks." My life was changed during that time. Is revival still possible? The answer is YES! Wouldn't it great to be part of the revival of 2013? We could be part of the revival of 2013! It is not as impossible as it sounds.

Why hasn't the Holy Spirit come to revive us? The problem is not the Holy Spirit. The problem is us! We are frustrating that revival with our incorrect **priorities**. What is the most important thing to you? There is only one right answer. Your top priority must be God! We are frustrating that revival with our lack of **unity**. Have you ever wondered what is wrong with "them"? Have you ever wondered why everyone doesn't listen to you? After all, you do have all the answers. David Wilkinson once said, *"When you strip it of everything else, Pentecost stands for power and life. That's what came into the church when the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost."* And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**