

Gracious God, open our ears that we may hear your truth, open our eyes that we may see your kingdom, and open our hearts and minds that we might know the cries of our brothers and sisters who are hungry, and hurting, and sometimes even dying without the knowledge of your love for them. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This morning, we conclude our sermon series, “Revive Us Again.” The concept of revival brings about some strong stereotypes of what revival is considered to be and these stereotypes have a strong basis in how you have experienced revival in your life. When we think of revival, many of think of special worship services with a guest preacher that take place over several nights. This type of revival tends to make us nostalgic. It tends to cause us to think back to our younger days when, for many of us, the church was the center of social activity. Days when we could, at least for a while, set aside these notions of the church being an organism that needed to adapt in order to reach the modern world so that we could retreat to the familiar, the old fashioned, the “if it was good enough for whomever” old time religion then “it’s good enough for me.” But I think that there is a flaw in that concept. Back in 2008 while being one of the preachers at a cluster revival over in Trenton, Georgia, I said this:

Now if our primary purpose in coming here tonight and over the next few nights is to sing our favorite hymns and songs out of the Cokesbury hymnal and to feel nostalgic and feel good about ourselves, then frankly my friends, I have better things to do. And really, so do you.

So if that is our purpose, let’s just call it a night, turn off the lights and go home.

But if our purpose in coming here tonight is to seek the face of the living God, and to experience God’s presence among us. If our purpose is to come

seeking the experience of our hearts being strangely warmed as we realize that God is by our side, that God is always with us.

If our purpose in coming here is to once again hear the old, old story of Jesus and his love AND by doing so, we find ourselves being refreshed, revived and renewed, then I believe that we have come to the right place.

For what better place is there than here and what better time is there than now to turn our hearts and minds to the worship of the living God and to renew our commitment to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, and with all of our strength and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Those words, issued nearly 12 years ago hold meaning for us today as we are once again confronted with a crisis. A crisis that threatens our health and threatens our pocketbook.

Nearly 2000 years ago, following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus promised the disciples that there would come a time when the Holy Spirit would be revealed to them. He promised that the Holy Spirit would come like the rush of a mighty wind... and as described in Acts chapter 2, the disciples have experienced this coming of the Holy Spirit and all who witnessed this awe inspiring event were astounded by what had happened. They heard the disciples speaking in their native tongues as visitors to this crossroad of the Roman Empire came from every corner of the known world. They experienced miracles and wonders and the skeptics among them expressed their opinion that these folks were just drunk... on new wine.

That's when Peter steps up and reminds all who are listening about what the prophet Joel had said:

"In the Last Days," God says,

"I will pour out my Spirit

*on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters;
Your young men will see visions,
your old men dream dreams.
When the time comes,
I'll pour out my Spirit
On those who serve me, men and women both,
and they'll prophesy.
I'll set wonders in the sky above
and signs on the earth below,
Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
the sun turning black and the moon blood-red,
Before the Day of the Lord arrives,
the Day tremendous and marvelous;
And whoever calls out for help
to me, God, will be saved."*

And, in speaking of saving grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he says

"I have pitched my tent in the land of hope."

What a statement that is on his part. That by trusting in Christ, we pitch our tent in the land of hope.

In this time of national calamity when this house of cards that is our economy comes crashing down around our heads and we face the unknown of a highly contagious disease that as of yet has no cure and we are only beginning to see a glimmer of hope in treatment, we need to return to our roots in the faith. We need to get our bearings once again, setting our sights on what is important,

reshuffling our priorities so that God is first in our lives and by doing so, we can rest in the land of hope that comes from living our lives as sons and daughters of God... reclaiming the birthright that is ours as we seek to do the will of God in our lives.

The hope that we share is built on nothing less than the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. On Christ, the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

This land of hope that we have through Christ is so foreign to this world of despair. And all too often it is foreign to us because we have allowed the things of this world to take precedence in our lives.

We have turned to political systems; to politicians and to governments to meet our needs and to define our identity rather than seeking to be identified with the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In some cases we have allowed ourselves to become pawns of political parties that court us for our votes by appealing to the values that we hold and then they turn their backs on us when they gain power through the ballot box.

We have pledged our allegiance to a flag and to a national identity rather than pledging our allegiance to the Christ who suffered and died on a cross of shame because he loved us and wants nothing more for us than the very best... an ideal that is expressed in an open and loving relationship with the creator of all things.

We have allowed ourselves to be used and abused because we have continued to place our hope and our trust in the things of man rather than setting our sights on the Kingdom of God.

In this time of watching helplessly as the “stuff” that we have depended upon for our security has evaporated away as this house of cards that is our

economy collapses around us, it is comforting to know that God's economy is not our economy. Thanks be to God.

Man's economy is based upon things.

God's economy is based upon relationships. Relationships between God and us. Relationships between our neighbor and us. In God's economy, everyone has a place at the table. It doesn't matter if you're poor as dirt or if you have plenty of the things that are valued by people, status, wealth and the like; you are welcome at the God's table.

The grace that we have been given is a gift to all people. The gift of eternal life through acceptance of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is a gift that has been given to all people. We are just called to accept the gift.

God's economy is not based upon greed. God's economy is based upon justice. Justice for all the people.

It is an economy that acknowledges that God is supreme; that God is over all things and that God is at the center of our very being. It is an economy that forces us to put everything into the perspective of Kingdom principles and Kingdom living.

When God is given his place then not only does justice take priority, but the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the unjustly imprisoned are freed, children are loved and cared for, and the elderly are respected and can live the remainder of their lives with dignity and purpose.

When God is given his place, then we can throw Caesar his bone and we can get on with being the children of God that we are called to be.

When we give to God what is God's (which I believe is everything) it also means to open our hearts and give God the opportunity to restore hope in our hearts.

It means to give God the anxieties and the paralyzing fears that prevent us from thinking and acting rationally.

It means to give God the anxieties and paralyzing fears that shut out hope.

It means that we give God our full attention so that we can hear the phrase said so often by angels and by Jesus himself: "fear not".

When we are living in God's economy, we don't have to fear. Because God is with us. And when God is with us, what can stand against us? What can harm us?

Nothing. Because with God on our side we have all that we need.

The things of this world can and someday will all pass away, but the things of God endure forever. Jesus has come into our hearts and fear is gone.

We know what the future holds and we can celebrate that future and share it with others.

So the question becomes, how do we reclaim the priorities that we need to reclaim in order to get ourselves back on track and where we need to be?

The author of 1 Peter gives us a clue. We need to remember that "by his wounds [we] are healed." By the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf, we are healed of all of the things that separate us from God. We are healed of the pain and the shame and the sorrow that tend to steal the joy from us and spoil our relationship with the God who loves us and cares for us.

Jesus paid the price so that we could once again enter into the presence of the living God and claim our inheritance... an inheritance characterized by unlimited love for us... love that we are called to share with others.

Our lesson today is an encouragement to hold on... to remember that God is with us always... to live our lives in a way that shows that world that our relationship with God is real and true and sustaining.

By his wounds we are healed. Healed of the hurts. Healed of the shame. Healed of the pain that our natural, sinful nature calls down upon us.

My friends, in this time of questioning. In this time of turmoil. In this time that we find that the world is upside down, the best is that God is with us. God's love sustains us. God's care enfolds us. God's wounds heal us and bring us closer to the God of all creation who wants the best for us.

In this time, I urge you to seek a revival and renewal of your faith and trust in God. I urge you to hold on to hope. Hold on to the things that bind us to God and experience the healing presence that God provides through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

We are heirs to a promise of hope. Claim that inheritance and live. Claim that inheritance and love.

Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.