

Sunday, July 9, 2023

First Lesson : Genesis 35:1

Gospel Lesson: Luke 2:25-35

Sermon Series: Revivals that Move Mountains Week  
One: Jacob and Simeon

- We are beginning an 8-week sermon series called “Revivals that Move Mountains.” This is a sermon series that is designed to get our minds, hearts and bodies refueled, renewed, re-energized and refocused on the work of the ministry that lies ahead for us;
- For let’s face it, as a denomination as a whole, there are many conversations and moving parts that are happening in our midst, as it pertains to the work of justice, mercy, inclusion and more;
- Not to mention, I would be remiss if I did not name that every time you and I engage in such work together, whether it be *Justice in Action*, as we continue the long road ahead of bringing reform and better access to those incarcerated and those needing mental healthcare resources, or whether it be us seeking to bring forth Vacation Bible School to our youth, children and families;

I stopped by to suggest that each of these endeavors and more, takes a physical and spiritual toll out of us, **no matter how** rewarding the work may be; **no matter how** important the work may be;

- As the Scripture informs us that *the harvest is plenty and the workers are few (Matthew 9:37-38)*;
- I stopped by to name that sometimes the worker in this instance **can feel like it is just you**, slaving away to set the captives free;
- Sometimes it can feel like **it is just you**, carrying the load and burdens of the spiritual tasks at hand;
- Hence why I believe that a sermon series that focuses on us reading about revivals of the biblical day, might inform us how you and I might be revived in our present day; so that we can keep on keeping on, **with a sense of optimism, with a sense of hope, with a measure of faith** and dare I even suggest **with a mustard seed of anticipation**, that will inform us that our work is not in vain;

- **That might even speak to** the deep recesses of our soul, that may tell us that we are alone in our current state of spiritual depletion;
- Only to be then enlightened and thereby liberated with a new understanding, that the need for revival in fact is not something to be ashamed of, but is an indicator that we are right where we are supposed to be in our faith journeys;
- For when I think about the imagery of Jesus carrying that heavy cross up to the hill of Golgotha, in which his earthly fate would not be much better,
- And then I think about how our spiritual charge is to share the burden of carrying this same metaphorical cross as well, the immediate question that rises up for me in light of this example is, “Do we expect our work to be easy?”
- Do we expect our burdens to be light?
- For my mother and father has always taught me as a child, that anything worth having, will not come easy; which means that **we have to work** for progress;
- **We have to work** for change;

- **We have to work** for peace;
- **We have to work** for justice.
- Furthermore, keeping this wise counsel in mind, this is why revivals from my perspective are both necessary and should therefore be cyclical in the Church culture in my opinion.
- For just as an automobile's gas tank, if driven long enough without being refueled, will inevitably become empty;
- A Church that does not have ways to address the spiritual tank of its parish, will inevitably become empty as well.
- And as the assigned spiritual leader of this community for such a time is this, my very clear statement to us all, if we don't get anything else out of this message is to proclaim by God's grace and instruction that..... **WE CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN.**
- For there are too many people in need of the Church...
- For if not us than who...
- If not now than when...
- So I will say it again ....**We can't let that happen!**

- We mustn't let that happen...
- As people of faith, we will not let it happen;
- Furthermore in learning about the revivals from both the Old and New Testaments, I have discerned that my passion in presenting this concept of revival, is right on par with other leaders of the faith.
- For throughout our biblical stories that we will engage over these next few weeks, I learned that other leaders of the faith would periodically be nudged by the Holy Spirit to lead their own revivals within their own communities.
- And according to the author Geoff Waugh of the book *Revival Fire*, there were 9 commonalities that these revivals shared;
  1. They occurred in times of moral darkness and national depression.
  2. Each began in the heart of a consecrated servant of God who became the energizing power behind it [*only 1 spark*].
  3. Each revival rested on the Word of God, and most were the result of proclaiming God's Word with power.

4. All resulted in a return to the worship of God.
  5. Each witnessed the destruction of idols where they existed.
  6. In each revival, there was a recorded separation from sin.
  7. In every revival the people returned to obeying God's laws.
  8. There was a restoration of great joy and gladness.
  9. Each revival was followed by a period of national prosperity.
- And so with that said, I don't know about you, but I would benefit from just an inkling of some of these results to rub off on my own personal situation and spiritual journey;
  - Therefore, let us go deeper starting with our first lesson in Genesis and see if we can see if any of these commonalities will unfold for us.
  - So in looking at Genesis Chapter 35, the servant of God in which a spark for a revival would show up would be with Jacob;

- However, one significant thing that we should note about Jacob, is this idea that any one of us may be called to initiate a revival in our families, communities, Churches and more.
- For when most of us think of having a revival, I am pretty certain that an imagery similar to **The Great Awakening, 1734-43 would come up.**
- For in December 1734, the first revival of historic significance broke out in Northampton, Mass., where a young **Jonathan Edwards** was pastor. After months of fruitless labor, he reported five or six people converted—one a young woman. He wrote, “[She] had been one of the greatest company-keepers in the whole town.”<sup>3</sup> He feared her conversion would douse the flame, but quite the opposite took place. Three hundred souls converted in six months—in a town of only 1,100 people!<sup>4</sup> The news spread like wildfire, and similar revivals broke out in over 100 towns.<sup>5</sup> Starting in Philadelphia in 1739, **George Whitfield’s** dramatic preaching was like striking a match to the already-underway awakening. An estimated 80 percent of America’s 900,000 Colonists

personally heard Whitfield preach.<sup>6,7</sup> He became America's first celebrity.

- So yes the historical fact that I just shared is indeed a revival.
- However, Jacob, teaches us that sometimes, often times in fact, revivals may not be as dramatic and charismatic as one might assume.
- For Jacob's name in itself was a classic and popular boy name.
- It comes from the Old Testament and means "supplanter," which is often interpreted as someone who seizes, circumvents, or usurps in which Jacob lived up to his name and then some;
- For Jacob usurped and seized his brother's birthright Esau.
- Jacob usurped and seized his father's trust in doing so.
- All which informs us that God can ignite any one of us to be that spark to revive a situation or circumstance in not just our own individual lives, but to the community surrounds us.



- So Jacob's revival task involved cleaning up the idols in which his family and community had become comfortably accustomed to worshipping.
- In giving some historical scholarship to this single were of scripture, no direct contact with Jehovah is recorded in Jacob's life from Peniel until after the shameful affair at Shechem.
- Then God reminded Jacob of his promise to return to Bethel and build an altar unto the Lord who had appeared to him there (cf. 28:22).
- Jacob, like many others, probably had been postponing the keeping of his vow and may have been in danger of forgetting it altogether.
- Perhaps his troubles at Shechem could have been avoided if he had more promptly moved on to Bethel.
- In any event, the Shechem episode made him ready to move and he promptly obeyed. But before departing, he called for a general, spiritual housecleaning. He commanded that all **foreign gods** be discarded.
- These would have included Laban's images which Rachel had stolen (31:19, 30–35), and which Jacob had

probably long since discovered, images which Jacob's slaves had secretly kept and worshiped, and probably some images picked up with the loot from Shechem.

- Jacob also called for them to purify themselves, perhaps by means of some ceremonial washing, and to change their clothes, as was customary when going to worship.
- Either way, in looking at the 9 commonalities that the author highlighted in which a revival accomplished; we see a little piece of every outcome at play by Jacob's initiation and insistence;
- For **the people were in a period** of unapologetic moral darkness, and as a result let their vision and purpose escape them.
- **The people had lost sight** of who and whose they were in their idol images;
- Therefore God seeing all of this, brings us to our first lesson with hopefully a newer level of understanding and engagement to instruct Jacob to "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."

- And the outcome as I invite you to read this story in fuller detail; the voice of God inspired Jacob to sudden and resolute action in stopping at once the tampering with idolatry, which had gone too far in his house.
- Three things would then be instructed by Jacob to his family:
- 1....**Put away the strange gods**-The teraphim, which Rachel had superstitiously stolen and carried with her from her father's house, (31:19,) and similar images and charms in possession of other members of the household. Among the spoils of Shechem may also have been idolatrous images.
- 2. **Be clean**—Rather, *cleanse yourselves*. This was doubtless to be done by ceremonial ablutions, but of what particular form we have no means of knowing.
- 3.**Change your garments**—This would be another and marked token of their assuming a new and higher mode of religious life and action and we can observe, there were priestly rites, and ceremonial purifications previous to the Mosaic legislation.

- Looking at our gospel of Luke, we see another revival emerge with the spark of Simeon's influence;
- Where from the reading of the Gospels one may sometimes get the impression that all the Jews were dead spiritually.
- But here is a notable exception.
- For Simeon was **righteous and devout**.
- To note Simeon as being righteous may refer more particularly to his outward life,
- To note Simeon to be devout would refer to his inner attitude of reverence for God.
- In our gospel, the revival is therefore sparked with Simeon's quest for **the consolation of Israel**.
- In general, this phrase means the fulfillment of the Messianic hope. More specifically, "the Consoler" was "recognized as one of the names of the Messiah."
- And our gospel informs us that the Holy Spirit was **upon** Simeon.
- By special revelation he had been shown that he would live to see the Messiah (v. 26).

- For Simeon was a representative of what was best in Israelite religion at that time.
- For one biblical scholar suggests that “Simeon by his age and piety is the very personification of ancient Israel, the servant of God.”
  - Either way, it was because Simeon was the submissive slave of his Master, that he was given the greatest privilege of holding in his arms the infant Jesus and of being the first to welcome Him as the Messiah.
  - For had the whole Jewish nation adopted Simeon’s attitude per many biblical scholars, how different would have been its subsequent history.
  - Either way, what I cherish in both Jacob and Simeon is that Jacob teaches us that one does not necessarily have to have a lot of impressive letters behind our name nor even win any congeniality awards for that matter, to make a positive difference in our communities and world
  - What I mostly cherish in Simeon’s spark is this reminder for us to keep looking for Jesus in all that we do.

- For I named this in my message to the Heart of Christ Church a couple of weeks ago in Wichita Ks, as I was preaching about the invalid who was stuck beside the pool of Bethesda for 38 years; (The story can be found in John 5: 1-9)
  - That what made Jesus exchange most unique in this additional story that I am introducing , is that in other healing stories in the Bible, Jesus did not ask the people, “Do you want to get well?,” before healing them as he done with this particular man;
  - For in the case of the official's dying son, when the official asked Jesus to come to his house to see about his son, Jesus told him without moving his feet "You can go home," "your son is alive and well."( John 4:43-54)
- In Luke 4:38-41, when Simon Peter's mother in law was stricken with a high fever and the disciples asked for Jesus to come and see about her, Jesus merely stood over her and her fever disappeared and she was healed
- In Matthew 8:1-4 when in the midst of the large crowd the leper came to him and said "if you want to, you can make me clean." Jesus stretched out his hand and placed

it on the leper saying, "Of course I want to. Be clean!" And at once he was clear of the leprosy.

- So again there was no dialogue of Jesus asking this question to any of them....do you want to get well....Jesus just proceeded to heal....so why the different approach?

- And so what I see in this revelation, is that one can infer that this man was in a place of hopelessness

- This man was in a place of defeat

- This man was in a place of acceptance of this invalid condition

- This man was in a place of spiritual comatose....

- And how I can come to such a resolute conclusion;

-

- How I can suggest that this man was spiritually comatose;

- The reason why I can name that this man was in the need of a revival, is because here we have Jesus right there in his very presence and this invalid says absolutely nothing....

- He doesn't say help me

- The Word doesn't say that he moaned or cried or coughed ....nothing...
- This invalid lost his fire 38 years ago and didn't even have the will or energy to call out to Jesus for help...
- And Jesus recognizing this mindset in this man asks the question....do you want to get well?
- Getting back to Simeon in our main gospel today, Simeon embodies the mindset that Jesus was empowering this invalid to have;
- For regardless if the concept of a Messiah had fallen on deaf ears for some in Simeon's community, **this did not stop** Simeon's quest for Jesus.
- **This did not hinder** Simeon from learning on how to call on the name of Jesus;
- Making the ultimate message for us living in a modern day reality,
- Where the Church for some, is becoming as obsolete as the Britannica encyclopedias;
- That as seekers of justice and inclusion for all,
- **We can't stop** our quest for Jesus...
- **We must not lose** sight of Jesus



- We must keep seeking to hold our arms outstretched like Simeon **for Jesus...**
- For as the saying goes...*when the going gets tough... the tough gets going and my personal testimonial truth to you all today is that I am not tough without Jesus...*
- Our spiritual tanks will remain empty...**without Jesus....**
- Our progress as a people will halt...**without Jesus....**
- For as John 10:10 tells it *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*
- Thereby making our revival response today as a community to take hold of this Jesus who will lead the way; as we seek to distribute the load of this rewarding yet difficult work accordingly.
- Let the Church say Amen!