

Sunday, August 27, 2023

First Lesson: 2 Chronicles 20:3

Gospel Lesson: Acts 13: 4-12

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Sermon Series: Revivals that Move Mountains week 8

- We are concluding our 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 is always before us;
- Therefore in unpacking the role in which revivals have played in the scriptures, I would like to use *author Geoff Waugh’s book Revival Fire*, that I mentioned last week; in which we now have a slide for just in case you would like to take some notes, that reveals *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.

- Therefore, today's goal will be to look at the revivals that are occurring in both of our lessons today; see how these commonalities might reveal itself to us, **with the hope that** they make speak to our situation today.
- So for our last sermon installment, I would like to switch things up and begin with a personal testimony as a result of being in this sermon series, that I pray will naturally connect with what is going on in our lesson's today....
- In fact let me strike that last comment and proclaim that I have faith that what I am about to share, will most definitely connect with our stories today;
- For part of what has been awakened within me as a result of this revival sermon series, is that scriptures are meant to stir up an awakening within the soul.

- For when John 1:1-4 proclaims that *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people;*
- For when the apostle John, brother of James and son of Zebedee wrote this truth, I believe that what I am sharing reflects this truth in that when we seek to do life in scripture, **we essentially come into being.**
- Therefore, I would like to testify how **I have come into being**, as a result of this sermon series and I suppose the other sermon series; but especially more so in this series; with the hope that in my sharing, you may be able to connect the dots within your own life story;

- So how I have come into being, can mainly be summarized into one statement that I will flesh out more...but folks, **I am pretty certain I have been revived.**
- **I have been revived** in my confidence, as I am finally beginning to feel good in the skin I am in;
- For I am in a skin that is not perfect by any means;
- For I have stretch marks, and cellulite but I am ok with them all...in fact I celebrate all of my surface flaws, for there is a story reflected in every one of them, with successes that have been produced as a result of them; mainly two beautiful African American queens who are thriving in college; thereby making all of my physical imperfections seemingly perfect!
- **I have been revived** in my personal calling of being an ordained clergy in the Great Plains Conference, for I have once seen myself as simply

being an African American leader who needed to prove herself worthy to be a pastor;

- **Who needed to prove herself to be worthy in particular, a cross cultural appointment,** where I have recognized **that the main person who has been “othering” me.... has been me;**
- For there is a culture shock that **has to be worked through;** (there is that phrase again that was mentioned last week when I talked about Stephen the martyr for Jesus that I invite you to check out from last week); that I would imagine most BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) would have to experience, when placed in a different cultural setting from their own; in which I share openly, with the hope that congregations and BIPOC leaders and pastors along with their congregations, can begin to have open dialogue about this— with the hope that one day, **this will**

not be a thing that will have to be such a thing...or a consideration to have to worry about!

- For I celebrate our conference of the Great Plains, for making sure that there is adequate staffing and training resources to help all BIPOC clergy and their congregations make smooth transitions, so that all can thrive in these cross cultural, multi-ethnic settings— that our Church is identified to be within our conference;
- However, I have to name very clearly that all of the training and staffing in the world will not help, if both the clergy person and the congregation, **is not willing to be open to one another.**
- This is a long way of my naming that I genuinely feel that Lincoln First has been very open to me and my family;

- However my prayer to God through this sermon series has been for me to be completely revived in such a way, **where I can become fully open as well.**
- For in full transparency, it is difficult for me not to be guarded in general, but especially in this cross cultural setting, where past experiences in Lincoln Nebraska as a whole, **has taught me to be guarded.**
- Therefore, for those who have been with me through Covid, and through this transition of becoming a healthy, thriving multi-ethnic congregation...**I want to say thank you!**
- **Thank you** for loving me....through the good, bad and ugly...
- **Thank you for being patient with me** and for allowing this revival to come forth fully within my soul, so that I can really be here with you...

- For all that I have shared and more;
- For what perhaps may be awakening and stirring up within you as well; **informs us that revivals are possible...**
- Which further solidifies this idea that ***the best is always yet to come;***
- Which is why I celebrate King Hezekiah in our passage of scripture today in our first lesson; who reflects number 2 from our list of revival possibilities in scripture; who sparked a revival, **simply because he understood the importance of why broken doors to the house of worship need to be repaired!**
- In reflecting on our conversations from our Wednesday Night Applying the Sermon to Life class, the entire class was drawn to King Hezekiah's immediate focus in his leadership, being to repair the doors of the Church.

- For a lot of us were curious as to the who, what, when, why and how of why these doors were still in need of repair in the first place.
- For it seems as if any good leader wouldn't let such a condition remain for so long.
- Therefore in giving some key details of what is going on in this story; The *first month* is here to be understood of the first month of the Jewish year.
- Most importantly, the first month of Hezekiah's reign may also, at least in part, have synchronized with the month Nisan.
- The reformatory character of Hezekiah's reign was thus signaled at its very beginning, by an act which must have cheered every pious heart in the realm.
- For the shutting of the doors of the temple, and the consequent suspension of the sacred service,

had been one of the most presumptuous sins of Ahaz.

- In light of this, not only did Hezekiah repair the doors; **he plated and overlaid them with gold**, and probably other kinds of metal too.
- Furthermore this reforming act thereby denoted Hezekiah, **to be one of Judah's greatest kings.**
- For in summary, **in the very first month of his sole reign** (in 715) **he opened** the temple **doors** to repair **them** and restore the Lord's house, since Ahaz, his wicked father, had barred **the temple** (2 Chron. 28:24).
- Hezekiah gathered **the priests and the Levites** before the temple (**on the east side**) and commanded them to **consecrate** themselves to the work of purifying and repairing **the temple**, which, in the years of Ahaz especially, had fallen into a sorry state of deterioration.

- And so for me Church family, in reading this brief piece of history under King Hezekiah's leadership that lasted 29 years; suddenly I am able to connect the dots for what is meant by us being named to be a Reconciling Church;
- For not only are we naming that we are inclusive to all, **regardless of what we may check on the US Census box;**
- We are naming that as a Church community, **our doors are open to everyone.**
- Furthermore, the work of justice becomes, **identifying the doors that are still broken and fixing them expeditiously as a community.**
- For where the confession still needs to be fully birthed from the Church and the society as a whole from my perspective, **is that some of the doors are still in desperate need of repair.**

- For **there are still broken doors** that are shut off to many sections of our society...
- **There are still metaphorical doors** within our own church community that may not be completely shut off,
- But let's just say they are **ajar**...
- **Our doors are slightly open just enough**, and the scriptures this morning are urging us and may even be challenging us— **to keep on working within ourselves and communities, so that the doors can swing wide open; so that the full potential of our revivals can fully come forth.**
- Furthermore, this is why I am moved by Paul in our second lesson this morning.
- For in a sense, **we are witnessing what it will take for us to repair our shut doors so that revival is made possible.**

- For in sharing more details on this story, the missionary campaign which was initiated by God through the Antioch church, was now launched by the apostles under the evident direction of the Holy Spirit.
- For when the Word says **They sent them away**, the “they” is referring to the Church...and who was part of the “them” in this group would be John, Barnabas and Paul; all who were sent with the higher commission and personal direction of the campaign expressed in Luke’s statement here; **to become the divine commission and the human consecration collaborated in the inauguration of the first missionary enterprise of the church.**
- In laypersons terms, **they were there to establish a Church;**
- A Church that is not referring to a building...

- They were there to establish the Word of God, to be planted into the souls of the people, **so that the people could become the living Church; to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to let the oppressed go free.**(Luke 4: 18-21)
- In light of our earlier conversation...they were there to essentially **open the doors to the people, to let them know that all of this and more was a possibility, through Christ Jesus!**
- However, there was a threat to this repair of the metaphorical doors; his name being revealed in verse 8 of our story; the magician Elymas who opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
- So there was a lot of questions from our class regarding what kind of magician was the scripture referring to.

- For as a class, we did not think that the scripture was referring to a magician who was pulling a rabbit out of a hat!
- Therefore in my research, I am drawn to how scholars have named Elymas to be one of **spiritual concern** in which I am drawing my preaching energy from.
- For there were several concerning details that biblical scholars have drawn from this character Elymas or Bar-Jesus that are noteworthy.
- *First*, he was an apostate Jewish prophet (v. 6), a man who had known the light of the divine revelation and had turned from the light to darkness (cf. Matt. 6:23; Luke 11:35; John 3:19–21).
- *Second*, he was a **false prophet** who subtly used his knowledge of the secret mysteries of the divine revelation, into which he had been initiated as a

Jewish prophet, to pervert the truth of God (v. 10b).

- *Third*, he was a **sorcerer**, or one who trafficked in “black magic,” the most wicked and demoniacal of all known practices (v. 6).
- *Fourth*, he was a learned, wise, shrewd, cunning man, as his name Elymas (wise, skilled, learned) signifies. Since Bar-Jesus was his Jewish name, ironically signifying his purposes, in its Anglicized form, Elymas was probably the title given him by the inhabitants of Paphos in recognition of his skillful, though wicked, practices. Thus he was known at Paphos as Elymas, Bar-Jesus, or a doctor.
- *Fifth*, he seems to have been totally devoid of any remnants of such moral principles as sincerity, honesty, or good intentions, and so far depraved as to be capable of the most vicious or heinous

crimes, as suggested by Paul's rebuke: **O full of all guile and villany.**

- *Sixth*, he appears to have so yielded himself to Satanic influence as to become partaker of the demoniacal nature to the extent that Paul could address him as **the son of the devil.**
- And finally *Seventh*, though strategically situated in a position of tremendous influence as the proconsul's moral and religious adviser or court chaplain (v. 7a), his evil influence was cast against every moral, religious, social, economic, and political good of humanity and the community.
- Therefore, at all of this revelation, I applaud Paul for having the strength **to call out** the culprit who was keeping people doors from being able to be fully opened.
- For there were some in our class who questioned why Paul was so incensed with rage to the point

where he was cussing the ground that Elymas walked on;

- However, if I am honest, in this justice work of seeking reform for those who are suffering from mental health care access and criminal justice reform as an example, I too am frustrated that enough policy makers are **not being called out** upon, to repair these broken doors.
- For as love and justice seekers, we are **to call out** when our neighbors are not able to live fairly and justly.
- We are **to call out** when things are not just.
- Thereby making our work becoming educating ourselves about the workings of both our local and national governments;
- By exercising our voting rights when we are able to do so;

- By being present in our community and in important conversations as best as we can and/or ensuring that trustworthy members of our social circles and communities can be present when we are not able to do so;
- By being active in our churches, organizations and more that are involved in being invested in the well being of their neighbors and communities
- By being tuned in and informed about local, state and worldwide current events and current affairs and/or being in conversations with people who are regularly tuned into these affairs; for me I rely on both my own inquiries and I am in regular conversations with my mother who is tuned into CNN and MSNBC on the regular;
- By being supportive and active with organizations in our very own Church community, like our very own *Hunger and Poverty Committee*, who regularly

bring opportunities to us for ways that we can engage with our governmental leaders; for last year only three people participated in the letter writing activity to our governmental officials and I need to iterate that just because we are a member of *Justice in Action*, does not mean that we neglect or stop these other meaningful efforts to share our voice and concern;

- For all of these ways and more are how we **call out** for those who are unable to stand.
- All of these ways and more are how we **call out** for those whose voices that are silent.
- So it cannot be an either/or when we are seeking the work of justice....it must become a both/and in our efforts!
- For this character of Elymas aka Barjesus, shows us just how determined some are to keep the doors shut....

- Characters like Elymas, that I continue to invite us to extrapolate in our own circumstances and observations, **teaches us just how insidious** it can be, to think about how doors can remained broken and shut for so long;
- Thereby informing us why we must pray to the One who teaches us in Matthew 7:7: *Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened;*
- With the hope that we have been revived just enough to have the courage to do so.
- Let the Church Say Amen!