



REVIVAL II

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Introduction

Today's lection or scripture reading (Job 5:8-16) tells the story of Job and his friends. Job lost everything: His 401K was wiped out; he could not afford health care; his food and cattle were obliterated; and all of his children and servants were killed. Job was angry about his situation at points. At other times, he was dazed. But through it all, Job held on to the God in whom even the bereaved, depressed and poor can place their hope. This is why Job recommends that it is to God that we commit our cause, because God is ultimately in control.

The enemy was convinced that Job would yield to his temptation if he just imprisoned him with illness, rendered him childless, and burdened him with poverty. He was

convinced that stripping Job of the trappings of his worldly possessions, jailing him in a place of hopelessness, and confining him to a cell without caring friends would provoke Job to curse God. The devil was wrong. Instead, Job blessed God in the midst of his suffering.

Although his sentence and suffering were not due to his sins or errors and he at times lapsed into states of self pity, Job, as indicated by today's Lectionary Commentary, continued to look to God as his source of hope. Despite his personal losses and the state of the world around him, Job trusted God. He rebuked the negative advice of his wife and friends. He personally submitted his case to God and wrestled with God until his change came. He waited for his revival. In the end, Job was revived. He was renewed. He was restored.

Job's revival enabled him to give his children an inheritance—the least of which was his unyielding faith and trust in God.

The church needs a revival of trust in God to handle all of our needs, problems and sufferings, including our broken economic circumstances. In Revival I the text taught us to do our part as Christian stewards (i.e., leave a heritage of faith). However, at the end of the day, we also have to trust God to be our keeper and provider against systems that are designed to neglect and even harm the disenfranchised, poor and those who are trying to do the right thing. So we, like Job, are safe if we commit our cause (even financial causes) to God.

II. History

A revival is a series of meetings that we place on our liturgical calendar to indicate that there are moments that we believe that the church should pause for spiritual rejuvenation for the church and community. It is normally a local phenomenon; but, these local events can sometimes break out into larger “happenings” that change the whole landscape of both the political and religious dimensions of the nation. An example of such a revival is the widespread First Great Awakening that was spearheaded by the preaching of such well known preachers as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

This movement had political dimensions, in that it helped lay the foundation of egalitarianism and gave birth to other ideas that promoted the climate for the American Revolution. Here religious fervor helped found a nation, as the ideas that it represented broke out of the church into the larger community. When we as the church are true to the principles that make us who we are, the community will be affected.

Another revival that grew to be more than just a local phenomenon was the second great awakening under such notable preachers as Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, Alexander Campbell, and others. This revival emphasized the truth that God's salvation is not tied to one ethnic group or gender. The strength of this revival helped to inject reform movements into the larger community that included the abolitionist movement, early women's movement, and even the Civil War.

The Pentecostal movement arose from a great revival that included the Azusa Street Revival. That revival, with its emphasis on holiness and faith and salvation, made a great impact. Today, many religious denominations owe their existence to this revival.

It has not normally been seen as such but the Civil Rights movement was the product of revival and itself was a revival. It had overtly political overtones; but, one cannot get past the idea that the quest for human dignity and equality that lay at the foundation of this revival was simply a reaffirmation of previous revivals.

The people had a spirit of and quest for renewal and restoral. They wanted to be restored to a state of full human citizenship. They wanted to be freed from the legacy of slavery, shackles of Jim Crow and the burdens of second class citizenship. They wanted to leave their children a proper faith and financial inheritance. This revival, like the other great revivals described above, could not be limited to just the church. Yet the black church was one of its prime sponsors.

These large movements often start in our churches where we preach about “heart religion” and speak about change in people. Real revival will work out a change in the people. This change allows people to do what they may not have been able to do before the revival. And, these changed people change our churches, communities, and nations. Every time we schedule a revival in our churches we recognize that God may use this local revival to light a fire that will change the human experience, history books and our churches.

A Revival of Hope

We also schedule revivals to nurture humanity's connection to the Divine hand of God. This connection will create a revival of trust in the power and goodness of God. Thus, real revival will help the people construct a sanctuary of hope in the midst of a land of hopelessness. This search for hope and reliance upon the goodness and power of God is a common thread that runs throughout African American art, folklore, music, sermons and the African American experience. The following anonymous sermon excerpts are such examples:

Brothers and sisters, being a duty-bound servant of God, I stand before you tonight. I am a little hoarse from a cold. But if you will bear with me a little while we will try to bring you a message of “Thus sayeth the Lord.” If God is willing we will preach. The hell-hounds are so swift on our trail that we have to go sometime whether we feel like it or not...

It always makes my heart glad when I run back in my mind and see what a powerful God this is

we serve... Oh, ain't He a powerful God? He stepped out on the scope of time one morning and declared "I am God and there's none like me. In my own appointed time I will visit the iniquities of the earth. I will cut down on the right and on the left. But a remnant I will save." Ain't you glad, then, children that he always spares a remnant?¹

This thread of hope and reliance upon the Divine hand of God to revive the people, equip them with new leadership and usher in a new age is also reflected in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s paraphrase of Holland in Dr. King's 1956 speech at Montgomery:

God give us leaders!
A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts,
true faith and ready hands;
Leaders whom the lust of office does not kill;
Leaders whom the spoils of life cannot buy;
Leaders who possess opinions and a will;
Leaders who have honor; leaders who will not lie;
Leaders who can stand before a demagogue
And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking!
Tall leaders, sun crowned, who live above the fog
in public duty and private thinking.²

If God were to acquiesce in this request, surely there would be a revival of hope in the people.

III. Songs That Speak to the Moment

We'll Understand it Better By and By - Charles Tindley

One of the great barriers to hope is humanity's desire to transcend its finitude by knowing everything. But the scripture reminds us that "we walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). We will be tossed and driven by the seas of life. Some of us may have to wonder about our food and shelter; but, Charles Tindley reminds us that, like Job, one day we will understand why we must walk the lonely road of human existence. This song points us to trust God's future. In it we will understand. That knowledge can help us live through the trials we have to endure.

We'll Understand it Better By and By

*We are often tossed and driv'n
On the restless sea of time.
Somber skies and howling tempest
oft succeed a bright sunshine
In that land of perfect day,*

*When the mists have rolled away,
We will understand it better by and by.*

*We are often destitute
Of the things that life demands.
Want of food and want of shelter
thirsty hills and barren lands
We are trusting in the Lord
And according to His word
We will understand it better by and by*

*Trials dark on every hand,
And we cannot understand,
All the ways that God would lead us
To that blessed promised Land
But He guides us with his eye
And well follow till we die
For we'll understand it better by and by*

*Temptations hidden snares
Often take us unawares
And our hearts are made to bleed
for some thoughtless word or deed
And we wonder why the test
when we try to do our best,
But we'll understand it better by and by*

*Chorus
By and by when the morning comes
When the saints of God are gathered home
We will tell the story how we overcome
For we'll understand it better by and by.³*

Great is Thy Faithfulness – Thomas Chisholm

Any revival of hope would of necessity require a remembrance of both who God is and what God has done. Thomas Chisholm, in this great hymn, explicitly declares the faithfulness of our God. Yes, God has provided our needs in multiple ways. Here, we recognize both who God is and that God is faithful. In addition, we note what God does. These things cause even nature to join in and testify as a witness to God's great love, faithfulness, and mercy.

Great is Thy Faithfulness

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;*

As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

*Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!*

*Chorus
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!⁴*

A Little Talk with Jesus - Cleavant Derricks

Prayer is a necessary part of any revival of hope. In this song, Cleavant Derricks begins by accepting the reality of our present condition. He writes that we were “lost in sin.” However, he continues, “but Jesus took us in.” This process of “taking us in” causes light to shine through the dark places of our reality to touch our soul. This light fills our heart with love and places us in God’s book of remembrance. All of this comes from a simple “little talk with Jesus.” Yes, we can talk with Jesus, even if all we can do is make a “faintest cry.” Jesus will answer us and ultimately make it all right. Yes, the light of revival comes from Heaven and is fostered through prayer.

A Little Talk with Jesus

*I once was lost in sin but Jesus took me in,
And then a little light from Heaven filled my soul;
It bathed my heart in love and wrote my name above,
And just a little talk with Jesus made me whole.*

*Sometimes my path seems drear, without a ray of cheer,
And then a cloud of doubt may hide the light of day;
The mists of sin may rise and hide the starry skies
But just a little talk with Jesus makes it right*

*I may have doubts and fears, my eyes be filled with tears
But Jesus is a friend who watches day and night;
I go to him in prayer, He knows my every care,
And just a little talk with Jesus makes it right.*

Chorus

Now let us have a little talk with Jesus.

Let us tell Him all about our troubles.

He will hear our faintest cry

And He will answer by and by.

Now when you feel a little prayer wheel turning,

Then you'll know a little fire is burning.

You will find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.⁵

IV. Cultural Responses to the Moment

A Revival of Hope

Dr. William Turner, in the Lectionary Commentary for Revival II, reminds us that sometimes our revivals can have more sound than light. Sometimes, our revivals are, according to Turner, “little more than a moment for escape from the trouble of the world.” This kind of revival may get people to shouting, but it does not prepare them to be witnesses for God in the world. In addition, such shallow revivals leave the poor and vulnerable with no bulwark against the encroaching forces of darkness that they will inevitably face.

Make no mistake about it; we live in a world of uncertainty. Some of us live in the midst of a painful reality, as the enemy attempts to rob us of any form of security. But then there are others of us who have been living a different life. We have a life that seemingly is sheltered from the pains that those on the underside of society have had to endure. Yet, the economic crisis that began in late 2008 clearly demonstrated that our houses, cars, and even our jobs can be taken from us in the flash of a moment.

Uncertainty fosters fear. Our people need something that will outlast the few hours of religious entertainment that sometimes is falsely called “revival.” While we cannot totally eliminate the uncertainty of the human condition, we can combat the fear that that uncertainty attempts to create in our community. We ultimately combat that fear through a persevering faith in God. We cannot know what will happen in the future, but we can preach a message that transcends the issues of this present evil world by becoming connected to the resources of our powerful God.

The text reminds us that, like Job, we can easily lose it all. It is at times like these when our hopes are dashed and our dreams are killed that we come to church to try to meet a God that has something to say about our situation. We may get angry and hurt as Job was, but Job still decided to come to God for answers. And, our people will still come. And, just as with Job, God will offer us a true revival-- a revival of hope through a connection to the Divine.

How Can We Foster This Revival of Hope?

Hope is not something that comes easy to many. We cannot give false ideas hoping that they will foster trust. We cannot offer people guaranteed financial blessings if they will but “plant their seed.” Instead, we need to fall back on the resources from our tradition that have helped us in the past and will help us now and in the future.

1) Remember What God Has Done

The first thing that will help us foster this revival of hope in the most high God is to help people remember God's working in our past. In the book Life Sketches, Ellen G. White wrote, “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us and [God's] teachings in our past history.”⁶ We will never foster a revival of hope without a full understanding of God's work in our past. This work must include a remembrance of what God has done for us personally.

But this looking back is more than individual activity. We must look back corporately. We must look at how far God has taken us. If we are to trust that God is faithful, we must see the God who helped a people survive the middle passage. We have to remember how God helped the same people through the years of a hopeless and seemingly endless slavery. We cannot forget the disappointments as Reconstruction turned into Jim Crow. And we must never forget the work of God through the movement for liberation in our own country. If we are to trust God during these subtle days of a “post racial society,” then we must never forget “the Lord's leading in our past history.”

As an offering to God and opportunity for the people of the church and community, the revival services can be structured to include an age-based testimonial service: the elderly could be asked to share personal examples of God’s faithfulness to them; the children could be included in skits and oral presentations that focus on God’s love of and faithfulness to children; the youth could be asked to write and present a Hip Hop Choir Poem that reflects God’s faithless to youth, using biblical and personal references; and, the young adults could be asked to present the Job story, in dramatic form, to the congregation.

2) Recognize that God’s Blessing of Revival May Not Be Financial

Because of past errors that have confused many minds, we must actively fight the faulty mindset that God's blessing of revival is only about financial blessing. Certainly God may bless us in our finances, but the revival of hope that we are seeking to foster cannot be based in the American Dream. That dream, in many respects, runs totally counter to the will of God. It is commercially based, often corruptly implemented and frequently excludes large sectors of the overall community. In contrast, God’s blessings are for all. He smiles upon the just and unjust.

Our mothers and fathers didn’t go through the dark days of the past so that we would be possessed by the demon of materialism. The courageous pioneers didn’t place financial blessings above integrity and loyalty to truth. If we are to have a revival of trust in God,

we must actively attack the mindset that would define God’s blessing solely in financial terms.

To engrave this concept in the minds of the people, the youth department could be asked to read and present to the congregation a synopsis of Leo Tolstoy’s short story, “**How Much Land Does a Man Need?**”⁷ That story highlights the untrusting life of a man whose covetous greed for land led to his premature death, because he tried to acquire more than he needed or could use.

3) Recognize That God’s Blessing of Revival Always Solicits a Human Response

This revival of hope is not cheap grace. It is not a faith that does not work. It is a faith that cannot help but work. No, if we are to foster the revival of hope, we must recognize that true hope will always propel a human response. We cannot simply trust in God and there be no change in our lives. Those outside of the community have a right to expect that those who “had church” at that revival meeting will live a different life than those who have not.

To highlight the human response and the types of resultant change that may be possible when individuals, groups or the church decide to take specific action to resolve a problem, the church, during revival services, could show excerpts from the movies Eyes on the Prize and/or The Color Purple.

4) Recognize that Celebration Must Not Wait Until the Full Culmination of God’s Blessing

There is certainly a danger of passivity when one celebrates God’s promises that have not yet arrived. We might fall into the trap of thinking that God will do it all in the future, so there is nothing to do today. While we must ever be mindful of this issue, true revival means that we cannot wait to do our part nor can we wait to praise God for the blessing that we will receive in the future. True revival means that we acknowledge that God is always at work and we cannot help but “shout about it.” Ultimately when we are in the midst of God’s revival, we will sing with our mothers and fathers about the shoes, robes, and all the other blessings that God has in store for us both now and in heaven.

Job celebrated and blessed God with his testimonies and prayers even while he was in the midst of his sufferings—even before his revival began. The church should be reminded that our people did the same. While still in slavery our fore-parents celebrated the hope of God’s blessings by creating songs to encourage themselves, educate their brothers and sisters about the promise of freedom and to overcome the drudgery of their work. The following song is one such example:

Walk together children,
Don’t you get weary,
Walk together children,
Don’t you get weary,

Oh, talk together children,
Don't you get weary,
There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.⁸

This song and songs like it served to revive the spirits of a people whom God allowed to be transported to an alien land for conscription into an alien service under a cruel and alien master who regarded them as sub-human. Like Job, they had done nothing to deserve their evil sentence. Also like Job, in spite of their condition, they blessed God with song and prayer while they were going through the fire.

Those people knew God, not because they were introduced to him by the First Great Awakening, the Second, Third or Fourth Awakening of the white church; but because God created them. A special relationship always exists between the one who creates and that which he or she creates. No one has to introduce them to each other. The act of creation does that.

Thus, our black fore-parents, because they knew God and had faith in his promises, knew that through their sheer acts of faith, trust and practiced belief they could create a new future for themselves and their generations to come. Although many of them would not personally survive slavery and would not personally see earth's Promised Land, the hope and encouragement that they received from the spirituals and blues ditties that they created allowed them to escape the full effects and measure of the hellishness of their current situation. That escape, too, was a Promised Land.

So, they celebrated for themselves. They celebrated for their children. They celebrated for the faithfulness of God. And, they celebrated for us, the unborn.

V. Stories and Illustrations

Joseph certainly knew the importance of hope and the reality of trust. Before he died, he made an oath with the children of Israel to take his bones into the Promised Land (Genesis 50:25). And when Moses led the people out of Egyptian slavery they took the bones of Joseph with them (Exodus 13:19). Ultimately, the story caused Joseph to be included in the Faith Hall of Fame (Hebrews 11:22).

Then there is the story of the three Hebrew young men who were thrown into the fiery furnace because they would not bow to the great statue of Nebuchadnezzar. These Hebrews demonstrated this faith that we are seeking to foster by recognizing God's power to save in Daniel 3:17; they placed their fate solely in the hand of God by saying, "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:18).

Our creation, inheritance and promised future dictate that we continually revive and renew our hope, faith and trust in God. Then, we will be able to meet the challenges of life and overcome the adversities that come our way. Placing our fate in God's hands, our Divine Creator assures our victory, regardless of our situation.

Notes

1. Long, Richard A., and Eugenia W. Collier, Ed. Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Pr, 1990. p. 281.
2. King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Facing the Challenge of a New Age: Speech at Montgomery, Alabama, December 1956." Ed. Richard A. Long and Eugenia W. Collier. Afro-American Writing: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry. p. 567.
3. Tindley, Charles A. "We'll Understand It Better By And By." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications: 2001. #418
4. Chisholm, Thomas O. "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." African American Heritage Hymnal. #158.
5. Derricks, Cleavant. "Just A Little Talk with Jesus." African American Heritage Hymnal. #378.
6. White, Ellen Gould Harmon. Life Sketches of Ellen G. White: Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881 As Written by Herself. [S.l.]: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc, 1943. p. 196.
7. Tolstoy, Leo. How Much Land Does A Man Need and Other Stories. London, England: Penguin Books, 1993. pp. 96-110.
8. "Walk Together Children." Negro Spiritual. African American Heritage Hymnal. #541.