

## **MESSAGE FROM ST. JOHN'S CHURCH**



### **Newsletter for March 2023**

#### **Rev. Daniel's Message**

Ok, I'm cheating. This isn't a message from me, but the writing of a friend, the Rev. Benjamin Cremer, a Wesleyan Methodist pastor in Idaho, who writes incredibly thoughtful and helpful pieces on Christianity and culture.

Many of you may be aware of events occurring at Asbury University in Kentucky, where hundreds of students and staff have been moved to repentance, prayer and even baptism, seemingly moved by the presence of the Holy Spirit. It has caused a lot of reflection and debate among Christians from every tradition.

One of the best pieces I've read addressing this is the following from Rev. Cremer. Even if you aren't aware of Asbury or have no real interest in what is occurring there, Rev. Cremer speaks some important truths about what the Bible says about revival, the intersection of religion and politics and the connection between revival and justice. Well worth the time to read!

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#### **What Do We Mean By "Revival?" – Rev. Benjamin Cremer**

Whenever I hear the word "revival" my first thought is, "what is being revived?" When we say "revival" we are implying that something was in decline or even dead and is now being "revived," rejuvenated, and brought back to life. Revival is often used as a religious word, but the word alone is neutral, having both good and bad connotations. A revival of a local music theater is a great thing, while a revival of authoritarian regimes is not.

The English word for revival wasn't used in a religious sense within the United States until the problematic ministry of Cotton Mather in 1702, who played a controversial role in the Salem Witch Trials, among other things. By 1818, the word revival was used to describe enthusiastic religious meetings, often by Methodists, that were meant to inspire a spiritual renewal among people. This is much like the term is used today.

Methodism, my theological tradition, has had a long history of tent revival meetings, where a preacher would come for the sole purpose of stoking a religious revival. It would last days long, even weeks at times. While tent revivals were notably Methodist, other iterations can be seen in American history by those like George Whitefield and Charles Finney, who would preach in open fields and spark revivals in entire towns. There have been many such religious awakenings in American history, each with its own unique complexity and outcomes.

You might be surprised to know that the Greek word for “revive” only shows up once in the New Testament, and it is from Paul in his letter to the Philippians thanking them for “reviving” their concern about him (4:10). This isn’t to say that revival isn’t found in the Bible. It is to say that I think the Bible defines revival as repentance.

Many of the prophets in the Old Testament for example will use the Hebrew verb "שׁוּב" (shub), which means to "turn back, return" in their prophecies to Israel, calling them to "turn back to God." This "turn back to God" wasn't just about a spiritual renewal though, but was always tied to the cause of the poor and most vulnerable in the land. Their call for Israel to revive their relationship with God was also a call to repent from neglecting or oppressing the poor and vulnerable. It was a call to join return and rejoin the ongoing work of God to “lift up the needy” and “bring good news to the poor.”

This call to repentance was a call to turn away from the things that destroyed and turn to the things that brought dignity and life, both for the individual and the community. If this call was answered, it would bring a revival of spirituality and justice for all, but it would be especially positive for the "least among us."

That, to me, is a great way to talk about “revival” among God’s people. Becoming spiritually awake to and returning to the ways God lifts up the most vulnerable among us. For this keeps Christ's primary commandment at the center of revival: "love God and love neighbor." If a "revival" just renews my own concern for God but not my concern for my neighbor, I probably didn't experience a revival at all. My love for God and my love for my neighbor are two boats on the same tide. One cannot be raised without raising the other. If my relationship with God doesn't result in justice and wellbeing for my neighbor, I need to question if I have a deep relationship with God at all. This is one of the most resounding themes in the entire Bible.

### ***What We Call a "Revival" and What We Don't.***

Where my mind goes in all this is how we commonly use the term revival today. Especially regarding what the broader Christian community calls a “revival” and what it doesn’t. Of course, many of us, like myself, grew up hearing the term “revival” used in Evangelical circles with deep politically partisan connotations. “We need a revival in this nation, to bring it back to God” it would be often said. Of course, this desire for a “spiritual awakening” had a very particular definition and objective. It was often in reaction to what Evangelicalism deemed as a “sin” it saw our culture committing and so “revival” carried with it the condemnation of our culture and the call for renewal of what “we” thought God needed to do. It carried with it the objective of a particular political party and influence gaining authority within the culture, placing Christians in the halls of power in order to combat this culture of “sin.”

It was a very biased against our culture and had very little to do with the spiritual renewal or repentance among Evangelicals. The spiritual awakening was seen as starting with the repentance of our culture, not among Christians, because the culture was seen as the enemy. We Evangelicals on the other hand, were already "saved."

This experience within Evangelicalism is a prime example of how our definition of “revival” can be deeply biased towards what we believe God approves of and what God doesn’t. It can be a clear indication of how much we believe we speak for God all while neglecting our own deep need for God.

The political context heavily influenced the revivals in American history as well, which I think it always will. Take the first and second great awakenings for example, which are two of the most famous and widespread religious revivals in our nation’s history. I don’t have time to get into all the details that caused these “great awakenings,” but I would highly encourage you to read about them on your own.

They are deeply fascinating and give a stark picture of the American religious/political context during that time. Political movements like temperance and slavery abolition grew out from these revivals.

One of the most notable things about these two great awakenings though is that they both happened in the midst of intense national anxiety about the future and right on the cusp of a major national conflict.

The first great awakening happened in the decades leading up to the Revolutionary War and the second great awakening happened in the decades leading to the Civil War. During that time, there was intense corporate anxiety over national and religious identity. Many were wracked with doubt and uncertainty over the collective future of the nation. People were so hungry for meaning, purpose, stability, and to be released from their uncertainty and fear. These revivals met those felt needs in profound ways.

I can't help but think of how similar our context is today. Look at all we've endured and continue to journey through together. A global pandemic. A global reckoning with racial justice. A reckoning with religious and political authorities and ideologies. The war in Ukraine and war in other parts of the world. Relentless gun violence. Natural disasters. Global warming. Artificial intelligence. The rise of authoritarianism. Deep questions about gender and human sexuality. This and so much more adds to our collective hunger for direction, purpose, meaning, and most of all, security for the future, especially for the poor and most vulnerable among us. It doesn't matter where we fall on the political and theological spectrum, we are all feeling uncertain about the future in one way or another. We are all looking for purpose.

Much like the America of our past, we seem primed for a "revival." We desperately want our hunger for direction and purpose to be met. This context is why it especially grieves my heart to hear what the broader Christian community calls a "revival" and what it doesn't.

For example, I have spent the last several years dedicating my ministry to those who have been hurt by the church and who are "deconstructing" their faith. People who are doing the daunting work of untangling their theology from destructive ideologies and toxic habits, all while trying to heal from their own religious trauma. These are some of the strongest, most genuine, authentic, and kind people I have had the pleasure of knowing. Some of them have gone on to do some incredible things, with renewed and profoundly changed faith, deeply dedicated to Jesus, which they never thought was possible before. I count so many of you who are reading this newsletter right now within that category. It is an honor to know you.

Yet, instead of calling this incredible movement a "revival", instead of seeing it as the work of the Holy Spirit calling the Christian community to repentance and healing, this movement was met with harsh criticism and condemnation by the broader Christian community.

The very people that were wounded, struggling, bringing reformation, and renewal within Christianity were marginalized and pushed outside of Christian circles for their questions and critiques.

I and those who are trying to untangle our faith from the problematic theologies and practices of our past seemed more likely to be sneered at as "woke" or "heretics" by fellow Christians, than we were to be seen as being in the midst of "revival." This really grieves my heart and tells me we have some deep biases over what we will call "revival" and what we don't. It seems it really still has a lot to do with political and theological ideologies than it does with the actual movement of God.

I have similar feelings regarding all the movements that have brought repentance and renewal within Christianity in our nation. Like the national reckoning with racial justice, the #MeToo movement, climate activism, and many others. These movements have caused deep reflection, repentance, and spiritual awakening for many Christians, renewing their love for their neighbors and their pursuit of justice for them. But, I have yet to hear these movements called a "revival" of Christian values from Christian leaders. It seems that when it is a movement of God that calls for Christians to repent, rather than just our culture, the word revival is seldom used, if at all.

I would certainly hope that wherever there is a revived focus among Christians on justice for the oppressed, good news for the poor, liberation for the captives, love for God's creation, and compassion for the most vulnerable, on top of a renewed spiritual awareness, it would be known as a "revival" of who we are meant to be as followers of Jesus. However, that doesn't seem to be how we Christians often prefer to use the term "revival."

*It's too messy to tell "what is being revived" right now.*

My personal desire for any "revival" is that hope would be revived for all people and that the cause of the poor and most vulnerable is prioritized, especially among us Christians. We must ask, "if our definition of revival is only about reviving our love for God as Christians and not about reviving our love for our neighbors, is it even a revival?"

However, I honestly think it is too soon to tell with the current revivals happening right now. The first and second great awakenings lasted decades. We are still reflecting on how they impacted our nation. I believe more often than not, we can only know something is a revival in retrospect. After we see what has been "revived."

The way I have been approaching these current events called "revivals" is by trying to understand them through the perspective of the students experiencing them. While many report about encountering the powerful presence of God, it has been difficult to pin down what they mean by that.

For example, I saw some students tweeting that they were so glad to see their female friends, queer friends, and friends of color leading the revival at Asbury, only to be heavily slammed by others online saying things like "it's not a real revival if it's led by women and homosexuals." I saw some other students post on Facebook that one of their friends testified at the Asbury revival that God had set her free from lesbianism and witchcraft. The comments section on that post turned into a vitriolic rat's nest, as you might imagine.

I have also read numerous articles on the Asbury Revival, all with so many different perspectives. All this only serves to confirm what I have been highlighting in this newsletter: the definition and experience of "revival" is going to be different with each person who talks about revival.

As I said at the beginning, my most dominating desire about all this is the hope that God really is doing something powerful! Don't get me wrong, I have my concerns just as everyone else does. I fear it will be co-opted for the sake of someone's power grab, as many things tend to be these days. I fear it will only remain a worship service, providing only a temporary emotional high that is called "the Holy Spirit," yet doesn't result in any real substantive spiritual awakening and hope for people or bear any fruit of real positive change in our world. But, I think it's too soon to say.

I think it is incredibly important to withhold judgment over these current revivals for the time being and just see what unfolds. I think we should watch them with humble curiosity and an authentic hope that something really good will actually result from them. Because the reality is, these things are and will always be messy. It won't be clean, cut, and dry as we might like them to be. Even if something good comes from them, something bad will most likely arise as well. It will always be a mixed bag. Such is life.

In the midst of all this, I can't help but think of how the crowd responded to the disciples when they were filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2. Much like social media today, the town square was literally filled with people from all over the world watching Pentecost take place and then they all heard the disciples speaking in their native languages. Then Acts 2:12-13 says, "Amazed and perplexed, some of the onlookers asked one another, "What does this mean?" Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

That is really where my heart is right now on the topic of revival. My desire is that instead of our culture hearing us Christians jumping to quickly dismiss it, make fun, or condemn it, it will witness us being both "amazed and perplexed" and asking: "what does this mean?"

My hope, as always, is that we Christians are heard responding with wisdom, integrity, and respect. Celebrating the goodness that we see happening while also being wise and discerning about the things we see that are harmful. I hope that we will do this all with a deep desire that God might yet still revive the heart of Christ among people, especially among the people we call Christians.

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*Ben has a weekly email newsletter that is sent out Sundays containing thought-provoking pieces on Christian theology, scripture and ministry, as well as great recommendations for further reading and study. If you would like to sign up for this free newsletter, you can do so here:*

<https://benjamin-cremer.ck.page/>

*You can also support Ben's work with a donation:*

<https://benjamin-cremer.ck.page/products/support>

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## **CHURCH NEWS**

### **New Sound System**

St. John's has recently invested in a new sound system to improve the audio quality of our livestreams. We are aware that in recent weeks we have continued to experience issues with mics not working properly, or too much feedback resulting in distorted sound. We have continued to work with the company responsible for the system to address these issues and welcome feedback from those using the livestreams. We believe we have generally addressed the most pressing difficulties but will continue to work at improving the online experience for those at home.

### **Masking**

Masking is no longer necessary to attend services. While parishioners are still encouraged to mask, especially if they themselves are concerned about their own health, it is entirely a personal decision. We do have masks available for those who would like to mask and forget to bring one but we do ask parishioners to try and remember to bring their own.

### **Tax Receipts for 2022**

Tax receipts for the 2022 have been mailed out in the middle of January. If you would like to receive a copy of the detail summary at how your amount was reached, please contact Lori in the church office at (905) 277-0462 and one will be sent to you.

### **Reminder - Envelopes 2023**

We will not be distributing parishioner envelopes this year. We have found the cost of the envelopes and the waste that they create is not worth the expense. We are encouraging everyone to consider again joining our (PAR) Preauthorized Payment program. You may also send in your offerings by e-transfer to church@stjohnsdixie.com. For those that would like to continue with envelopes we will have blue generic envelopes available in various places in the church and parish hall. Feel free to pick up what you need. We will continue to use envelope numbers for accounting purposes and will apply your offering to those numbers. Ensure you write your name and/ or envelope number (if you know it) on the envelope so the contents can be added to your offering total for tax receipts.

## ***SERVICE INFORMATION:***

### **Bishop's Visit**

Bishop Kevin Robertson will be visiting our Parish on Sunday March 5<sup>th</sup> at the 10:00 a.m. service. We encourage as many as possible to attend the service in person so you can meet our new bishop and he can experience what a welcoming and thriving congregation we have. He will be with us after the service at Coffee Hour.

### **Wednesday Eucharist**

We hold a midweek Eucharist each Wednesday at 10:00 a.m. with a small, in-person bible study afterwards. If you're looking for a way to start attending church again, but with a smaller congregation, this may be a good "re-entry" point for you. The service only lasts 30 min and the bible study after is entirely optional.

### **Lenten Vespers**

Each Wednesday (March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29<sup>th</sup>) during the season of Lent, we will be holding a Vespers service in the church at 7:00 p.m. This is a meditative service of music and prayer for the season. This year's theme is "Were You There" – a reflection on different biblical figures from the Passion Story. These services are also livestreamed and posted to YouTube for viewing later.

### **Contemplative Prayer**

On Thursday evenings in Lent (Mar 2, 9, 16, 23, 30) at 7pm, we will be gathering in the Peyton Room for contemplative prayer. This will be led by one of our parishioners, Paula Marshall with Fr. Daniel in attendance. We will be looking at various practices to encourage a deeper prayer life. You are welcome to join in just one, or all of these sessions. We hope to continue with this group after Easter on a monthly or possibly bi-weekly basis.

### **Easter Services**

**Palm Sunday** – April 2, 8am and 10am – Holy Eucharist with blessing of the palm crosses

**Wednesday in Holy Week** – Apr. 5, 10am - Holy Eucharist followed by Bible Study

**Tenebrae** - Apr 5, 7pm -. A service preparing us for Good Friday with solemn music and candles

**Maundy Thursday** – Apr 6, 7pm – Holy Eucharist with Foot Washing and Stripping of the Altar

**Garden Watch** – Apr 6, 8:30pm -12am – Stations of the Cross led by Fr. Daniel. The church will be open for silent prayer.

**Good Friday** – Apr 7, 10am – Liturgy of the Cross with Communion and Children's Program

**Easter Sunday** – Apr 9, 8am and 10am – Holy Eucharist with Children's Program at 10am

## ***EVENTS INFORMATION:***

### **SHROVE TUESDAY**

We had a good turn-out for our first Pancake Supper in four years. About 60 people in all joined us over the course of the evening and we had many volunteers helping with set up, cooking in the kitchen and cleaning up afterward. Thank you to Bobby Briones for organizing this, to Lori Corbett for all the shopping she did for it, and to each of the parishioners who supported this with their help or by buying a ticket.

## **PALM CROSS MAKING**

Those interested in making Palm Crosses for the Church should mark their calendars for **Friday, March 31<sup>st</sup> at 11:00 a.m.** We will be holding this event in the Parish Hall and Maggy Farnell will be on hand to assist with instructions. Please bring your own scissors and enjoy the fun and fellowship that goes with this event.

### ***PROGRAM INFORMATION:***

#### **Music Ministry**

Calling all singers! We are looking for more members of the choir!! No matter your experience, if you enjoy singing, please consider joining this friendly and fun community.

As music plays a large role in Anglican Liturgy, it is a very important and valuable way to participate in church life while offering your talents. Come hone your singing skills while making new friends!

Reading music is not a requirement. Jeff makes practice tracks for music anthems that we learn, so you can hear and practice exactly what your part is from the comfort of your home. Please don't worry, you will never be put in a position to do a solo. There is also the option to join only for the music heavy seasons of Advent and Lent - but you might have so much fun that you decide to stick around for the entire year.

We rehearse weekly on Wednesdays, 5:30-6:30pm.

Finally - many anthems include parts for other instruments such as trumpet, flute, violin or cello, and I'd love to know if anybody has any hidden talents that they'd love to share!

Please speak to the music director Jeff after one of the services to let him know that you'd be interested in lending your vocal or instrumental talents! You can also email him at [jeffreymcleod@gmail.com](mailto:jeffreymcleod@gmail.com) He'd love to hear from you!

#### **Children's Ministry**

Parents, grandparents and caregivers – we have a wonderful Church School at the 10am service on Sunday mornings, led by our children's minister Janice Kretchman. Using the Godly Play program, children hear and engage in the stories of the Bible as well as learning about the liturgical seasons. Giving our children a grounding in their faith is so important if we wish for them to have a connection with church later on. The children of our Church School are very welcoming, and they have a lot of fun together. Even if you can't make every Sunday, bringing your little ones to church to experience the faith community is a real gift, both to them, and to the church.

At our recent Vestry meeting the children held their own discussions with Janice about what they'd like to see / do more of at church. They really enjoy our All Ages services and getting to participate more in the liturgy. They also enjoy singing and want more songs they can sing along to (preferably with actions!) They also wish to have a small section of the church garden they can plant and tend themselves as "The Children's Garden". We will be working to make their wishes come true in the coming weeks.

## **Open Door**

On the first Sunday of each month, we are collecting for either the Open Door or the Mississauga Food Bank. Each month we alternate between the two **March is Open Door Month.**

The Open Door serve clients that are men, women and children. They are looking for hygiene products, household cleaning product and paper products such as toilet paper, paper towels and diapers. They also take donations of seasonal clothing for all their clients of all ages.  
events.

### ***LINKS TO PROGRAMING ABOVE:***

**St. Johns Church website**

[www.stjohnsdixie.org](http://www.stjohnsdixie.org)

**YouTube Sunday School link:**

<https://bit.ly/3ah5XpW>

**Online Coffee Hour Zoom Link:** Zoom Meeting at 11:30 a.m every other week. Next meetings: Sunday March 12 and Sunday March 26

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83962667012?pwd=UGljbnZ2WUIMaVgzNlRtU0Q5SmxxZz09>

Meeting ID: 839 6266 7012

Passcode: 112233

**Online Bible Study Zoom Link:** (Zoom Meeting only Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.)

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82570649568>

**Online Prayer Group – Thursday at 10 a.m.**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86710167010>

The Rev. Daniel D. Brereton, B.A., MDiv. FSJ

Incumbent Priest

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**\*Sabbath Day: I am not available Mondays**



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If you would like to receive this Newsletter by email, please call 905-277-0462 or email [church@stjohnsdixie.com](mailto:church@stjohnsdixie.com)