



REVIVAL THROUGH THE TRANSFORMING LOVE OF GOD

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ANTHONY BOATENG, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE METHODIST CHURCH, CHALLENGES THE CHURCH TO SEEK REVIVAL URGENTLY, IN A SUMMARY OF HIS ADDRESS GIVEN AT THE METHODIST CONFERENCE 2022, 'REVIVAL: THE METHODIST DREAM'.

Love is a consistent theme in the Bible. This overarching theme of this year's Conference, 'The Greatest Commandment', encourages us to focus on the transforming love of God and the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 and Acts 2:4-21.

The apostle Paul exhorts the Church of the Thessalonians to continue to grow in love in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12. For us, it means exercising patience and impartiality towards one another; it means creating space for the limitations of one another; it means forbearing one another. You see, friends, God has shown us love and mercy; in return, all he asks is for us to offer it back to others.

Over the years, I have been praying in my heart, yearning for revival - yearning to have power to comprehend the depth and breadth of God's power, and be filled with the fullness of God, because I know deep down the survival of our beloved church depends on it. Now for this to happen, as a church, we must repent from our sins, and wait upon God for his essential outpouring Spirit. That means as a church we have to be completely dependent on the sovereignty of God. Only then can churches get lifted out of spiritual indifference and worldliness into earnest desires for more of Christ and renewed commitment to our Methodist calling.

WHY REVIVAL?

I am sad to report that, according to our Statistics for Mission report, active membership has fallen by over 20,000 between 2013 and 2016. Unfortunately, this trend continued as data from 2019 suggests that active membership fell by a further 18,000. I am concerned that at this rate of decline we are going to go out of existence.

In every era the church needs revival - certainly now more than ever when we are having to grapple with countless issues. You see, without revival, the church will not survive, owing to division and spiritual dilution. It is time for us to strive to revive the Wesleyan fire in our everyday life. Now is the time to revive the Wesleyan vision. We need an encounter of the Holy Spirit in our worship, a deep sense of the intimate love of God which then flows into the lives of others through evangelism, Christ like-living, social concern and renewal.

According to Martyn Lloyd Jones, Welsh protestant minister, 'Revival, above everything else, is a glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is the restoration of him to the centre of the life of the Church.' In the heart of every committed Christian, there is the longing to know that quality and depth of spiritual reality, and the presence of God in one's personal life.

On 24 May 1738, John Wesley attended a group meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, where he received an experience of assurance of his new birth. In 1807 during the Primitive Methodist days, under Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, revival was apparent during the Mow Cop camp meetings.

More recently, between the 1980s and 90s, through the charismatic and ecumenical movement, the gift and empowering of the Holy Spirit was a regular occurrence through churches and congregations. There was collaboration and unity in churches including different denominations. It seemed, in some ways, to be a repetition of the Day of Pentecost, resulting in church growth. Those who were open to the work of the Holy Spirit became a part of it and those who failed to recognize it did not. Some may say that the Methodist Church was, as a whole, not open enough to the work of the Holy Spirit.

THE BACKDROP

Friends, I want to draw our attention to Acts 2:4-21. The overall message of this passage is about discipleship, our relationship with God and our worship of him. To offer a bit of context, prior to this event, Jesus gave his disciples a commandment: 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1:4-5).

Fast forward, during the Jewish festival of Pentecost, all of Jesus' disciples were gathered together. The city of Jerusalem was alive with people from all walks of life, including Jews who had settled there from all over the empire. It was a special day, but Jesus' followers were separate from the festivities. They knew about Jesus and the prophet Joel's prophecy. They wanted to be found in the presence of God. They were determined not to leave the same.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The disciples wanted to receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit came like a mighty wind, which filled the whole house where they were sitting. They discovered that God seeks an intimate relationship with each one of us.

The question is, as a church do we nurture intimate relationships with God enough? Like on the day of Pentecost, we need the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. I thank God there were some circuits, during the Covid pandemic, which held weekly prayer meetings via Zoom and still continue to do so today.

OUR WORSHIP OF GOD

Friends, what is the focus of our worship? Do we really allow space for the Holy Spirit to operate? Do we allow space to hear God's voice? Feedback and personal experience suggest that, in some of our churches, our worship of God lacks depth and does not incorporate the Holy Spirit. There is often little room for spontaneity and dynamism, which might make it difficult for us to appeal to the younger generation. Regular Bible studies and prayer meetings have become a thing of the past. We need to find ways to revive the things that were the bedrock of Methodism. We need a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit.

CREATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE

We need ideas and decisions that give hope to our future. Every church or circuit needs a decent size collaborative team of preachers and worship leaders every week or rotating

regularly to help provide consistency, and give the church the confidence to try new songs. I can almost hear Charles Wesley saying to us: 'What has happened to our worship?' We need a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit.

We need to invest more into our worship. We need a cluster of churches to come together to form a team ministry, in order to provide services in strategic locations to reach a missing generation. Sustainable, Spirit-filled and creative - these have got to be the key areas of focus over the coming year. We need to inspire more young people to get into ministry and leadership and this may just be the way to do that.

CHURCH UNITY

Notice that on the day of Pentecost, the people in the Upper Room were of one accord - there was unity. Boundaries and walls were broken. Friends, I submit to us that we need to come together with one voice.

Friends, we need a collective mind-set. We need teamwork. It is imperative that we share our resources. I believe this is one way to achieve church growth and take some of the load off our local preachers and ministers. We need to release our ministers to be ministers rather than allow them to become bogged down by property maintenance. We need to shift the focus of our church from committees to worship. We need to change the culture of how we do things. Why are we not getting a group of young people who are on fire for God to fill the gap in our preaching plan or evangelism? Why not trust them to bring something new? Why not invest more in them? This is just my view, and you may disagree. We need to be more creative. We need to trust our lay workers and people more.

EVANGELISM

Notice the process that led to the day of Pentecost: from Salvation to Transformation and then to Empowerment. We need to develop a more authentic message about the gospel. We need to revive the band and class meetings (or at least modernize them), apply the Methodist Way of Life in a non-prescriptive way through house groups and not just in the pulpit, to help disciple and transform individuals to transform their community. We need to create more leadership programs to equip new leaders to run house groups.

After the day of Pentecost, the disciples went on to evangelise and as many as 3,000 became followers of Jesus on a single occasion. You see when God wants to bring salvation to a community, the first thing he does is bring it to individuals. He then uses those individuals to become a symbol of salvation through transformation in the community. Lastly, he empowers them through a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Manifestation of the Holy Spirit is evangelistic. Friends, I propose that we need this in our evangelism.

As a church and society, we have become over dependent on the strength of the flesh - over dependent on our human wisdom - over dependent on books instead of the Bible. You see, any church that ignores the power of the Holy Spirit will plunder into dissolution.

Friends, how is our worship helping us to develop as disciples? Is there evangelism when we meet together? Is our evangelism inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit? Is it deeply rooted in the word of God? As a church we feel inadequate in the area of evangelism and the impact on our Christian witness is very apparent. We need to connect to Christ in such a transformative way that his light burning through us will draw others from all around. Friends, we must be people of worship. We must be a church of sound teaching. We have much to offer the world, but we need the power of the Holy Spirit in everything.

CONCLUSION

This year, it is my hope that we as a church will work faithfully alongside one another in love, and be prepared to put our heads above the parapet and thirst to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit. I look forward to a return to the intimate devotion to the Lord which Susanna Wesley knew in her Epworth home. I look forward to the day when the church will be filled with an abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit just as John and Charles Wesley received in their own day. It is my vision that we will see again a move of the Holy Spirit as Hugh Bourne and Williams Clowes saw on Mow Cop.

I look forward to the day when churches and circuits will hold regular prayer meetings and revival conferences. I look forward to the day when we will have a bold message about the gospel. I look forward to the day when we will revive the band and class meetings and commit meaningfully to our Methodist Way of Life. I look forward to the day when our worship will help us to develop as disciples. I look forward to the day when our evangelism will be inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit and deeply rooted in the word of God. I look forward to the day when there will be unity in churches, denominations and endless co-operation.

I look forward to the day when God's prophecy will be fulfilled again. When God will pour out his Spirit on our church; when our sons and daughters will prophecy; and all will see visions and dream dreams. Amen and God bless you!

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