

AUGUST 2, 2026

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Sermon "RnRnR: Revival" Revelation 2:1-7, Hosea 6:1-10

When I was in my twenties I did a five year stint as a Pentecostal. In that church at least once a year, sometimes more, we had revival services. These might go over the course of 3 or 4 days, or even a week or more. They were wild. Emotion was high, people would be crying, falling over, flopping on the floor, dancing in the pews. An evangelist would come to preach every night of the revival.

Sometimes the preaching, just the preaching would last for an hour and a half. Think about that. Some of you are about to lose your mind when an entire service goes five minutes past an hour. Just the sermon was an hour and a half! The full services would go for 4 plus hours. If you were on the worship team, which I was (I played drums) you just booked out that entire span of days because you were going to be there for certain. If you were in the congregation you were also probably there because beforehand you'd be guilty about the strength of your faith if you didn't show and digs would be made in the weeks following as well.

They were an experience. But were they revival?

That's what we need to answer. We have a revival service coming in a couple weeks. If we are going to experience anything from it, it's important to know what revival is and how to prepare for it.

When people think about revival my experience is that it's associated with those high octane services. Lots of energy. Lots of people. Lots of what folks might call "fire". The thing is, often no matter how amped up the services are or how long they last, revival isn't what happens even if that's what they are called.

Baptisms and altar call responses aren't even a good measure. Because those things can be emotional reactions rather than heartfelt transformation.

And that's the key. Revival isn't determined by what happens on the nights of the services. It's what comes after the services are done and gone.

Think about any major musical star right now. What would happen if they said they were coming to Chambersburg to perform a concert every night for a full week? No cost for a ticket, just show up. Maybe each night is dedicated to a different charity. All they ask is that if you're so moved there will be volunteers at the gates on the way out with buckets you could drop a donation in for whatever cause.

Chambersburg couldn't contain the number of people who would show up. Chances are good a ton of money would be raised for various causes. Nowadays artists take the liberty to split up music sets with little speeches about life, the world, or things near to their heart. It's not a concentrated sermon but we'd call them in church language homilies.

The energy would be insane. People would leave feeling moved and electrified. You often hear people after concerts talk about being inspired by the artist. It's not religious, but it's identical in experience to the idea of "revival".

What happens after? Pretty much everyone goes back to business as usual. Life returns to life.

Entertainment happened, transformation did not.

Let's use the image of someone whose heart has stopped. We've all seen it depicted in TV and movies. The crash paddles come in, someone yells "clear!", and they hit the heart with a jolt of energy. In the moment you see a jump on the monitor as the heart has a beat, maybe even two or three. They keep hitting it with the juice trying to revive it. If the heart doesn't respond did the patient revive? No. It's not about the beats that happen when the juice is pumped. It's whether it keeps beating anew.

The worship, the inspiring moment, the devotional you read in the morning that moves you, all of those are those paddles. They hit us with a shot of energy. The question is whether or not we are restarted, renewed, and transformed.

If that high point experience doesn't affect change, it's just entertainment with a cross attached to it.

Fortunately we aren't like that heart. The physical heart doesn't enter the room where the paddles are with any desire or intention. It just exists and either responds or it doesn't.

We, on the other hand, enter every experience with the ability to choose. We set our hearts and minds as to what we expect. Which means we decide if we are going to receive that energy and let it work in us and transform us.

It doesn't matter what we're talking about. Worship on Sunday, a Bible study, an opportunity to serve, or to fellowship, anything we enter that is part of our faith formation. What matters most is our heart when we step into it. How do we enter it? Because the music, the performance, high or low energy or emotion, none of that

matters. What matters is our spirit.

People come into faith moments with all kinds of reasons. Some it's because it's just what they do and it's routine. Others it's wanting entertained. Others it's diligently seeking God and focusing in on the Spirit through the entire experience. Others it's to criticize. Others it's to find a place and way to serve. Others it's just entering with a bad attitude...or a wonderful one. Whatever we bring to the occasion has everything to do with what we get out of it.

In other words it's more about us than the experience itself in so many cases. Revival happens everywhere a heart is open to let God work and transform us into a truly new creation. Over and over again as we try to be more like Jesus.

This is what is happening in our scriptures. The problem with the people of God isn't their performance of "faith practices". It's their HEART.

Hosea is lamenting and frustrated. The people do the sacrifices, the offerings, the prayers. That's all in place. The problem is their hearts are no longer with God. How is it evidenced? How the act towards one another. They are just as distant, uncompassionate, abusive, even hateful as those who have no faith at all. I would suggest that every time they do their worship God is sending a bump of energy, call, or direction. But it isn't taking.

They need revived in their hearts so that their passion to live their faith is restored or reignited. In some cases not reignited, ignited for the very first time. People can live their whole life in church without being fired up to actually translate faith into a transformed life. Into an active call to bring others into faith.

Then there is Ephesus. This isn't written to some future church. It is written to a real church at the time. It was part of a circuit of churches in Asia Minor. They were dealing with Roman persecution. The rest of the book of Revelation is a warning and encouragement to not let the Roman Empire compromise their faith. What did they have to worry about?

They had the performance down. They knew how to behave. They knew how to police one another's morality. They knew how to sort out valid vs. invalid apostles. They had the actions and judgments down well. What did they not have?

They didn't have the love of Christ they had in the early parts of their faith. They knew the actions but didn't have the devotion as to why they were acting. We see this a lot today. "Do the right thing" and then be judging at those who don't. It's worn like a badge of honor. A piety merit badge. But the question is "why?" Is it because of love of God and love of neighbor or is it because of taught behavior and a self-righteous judgment? Or is it because of a humble living into the image of Jesus? Trying to help others live a better, more kind, loving, and gracious life? Is it inviting in or pushing out if people don't "measure up"?

They had lost that initial spark that caused them to do things because of their faith in Christ. It had faded. Once again the heart needed restarted. It needed a bump. If they got it would they receive it? If revival was offered would they take it? Or would they just enjoy the emotion and energy of the moment and go right back to business as usual?

That's the question before us every day, every week, every revival service. Are we looking for that continued growth in our relationship with God? Are we consistently open and humble to seek God in light of our own faults so that we can become more like Jesus? Are we willing to follow the lead of the one who sacrificed all on our behalf? Are we willing to look past the expectations of a culture, a country, or a party so that we can see one another in light of the authentic Christ?

This message of Ephesus should be a regular reflection for every Christian today.

Where is our priority?

Here's something that I believe needs addressed for longtime Christians. As we grow and age and life changes it can be difficult to answer this about falling in love "again" with Jesus. Can you remember when you were most passionate about your faith? Can you recall when you were devoted to a place of fiery commitment to live into that faith in a fruitful way? Maybe that's you now. If so that's great. If you are feeling like your faith is more passive than active. More waiting to receive than jumping to participate like you did in other years please consider and hear this.

In all of our lives our skills, abilities, and responsibilities change. What I could do in my 20s I can't do now. The responsibilities, the skills, the perspectives are different. Does that mean I can't still be passionate about my faith? Or anything else? Am I condemned in all ways to a life of humdrum, routine, and unfruitful? Do I give in to the cultural push that my life is all about me and let everyone else fend for themselves? NO!!!!

I can still ignite that spark. Just because life has changed doesn't mean my commitment to faith and Christ does. Those new skills, responsibilities, perspectives and such? I can still use them to serve God. I can still be

active and passionate about letting the Holy Spirit use me and those parts of me that have changed to bring Christ to the world! It's not about what I have to offer. It's about offering what I have with devotion and enthusiasm to God and to the world!

Think about your own passions in life. Your own relationships that have lasted for a long time. None of them are the same after decades as they were at the beginning. The newness is gone. But that passion and spark can remain.

I think about martial arts. I'll never recapture those early months and years where every technique and insight was fresh and new. Excited to learn everything. My body was more able and my mind more fresh. After almost 40 years I can't do the same things. I still learn but it looks different after a lot of experience. Yet I still find life and passion in it. Where I might not be as excited for the next mind blowing idea I'll learn (though I am when they happen), I am even more excited about seeing my students learn those things. Watching them grow into themselves and the art. Different phase. Same passion. Same love and same life as at first.

In relationships it's no different. We get older. We get familiar with each other. Things got routine or taken for granted. In work if we are still in love with our company we keep trying to find ways to make things better. To innovate. To improve whatever our business happens to be. If that spark is gone we just bide time, cash the check, and do the same old same old.

In a marriage we try to find ways to keep expressing our love. It's not just saying I love you. Over time those words can fall on deaf ears. They mean little if there is no action backing them up. So we try to find ways to support each other, know each other, and keep the relationship alive and fresh as we can. It doesn't stagnate or stale. Why? Because we don't let it. It's too important to us.

Revival is the same way. It's the continual reinvestment in our relationship with God. We fan that flame in our hearts to be committed in heart and deed.

When we hear about "revivals" in the country but nothing about any real change in the place they happen it's suspect. Baptisms and altar calls are meaningless if there's no follow through. It was just an emotional moment. When there's no difference in how people respond to or view the hungry, the poor, the abused, the neglected, revival hasn't really happened. It's just business as usual.

On the other hand, revival changes things. It changes hearts and actions not just for a moment but for the long haul. It is re-igniting that passion for God that pushes us to look to what how we can translate the moment into sustainable action to bring God's Kingdom here and now.

So here's my challenge. Don't think about what you can't do. Don't think about what's too much because you're not who you used to be.

Who ARE you? What CAN you do? Where is your passion? Where do you want to see God's reign brought front and center not in the big picture that's overwhelming. In our immediate here and now. In our community of faith and community at large?

Is that fire still there? Do you want it? If it is and you do, the next step of revival doesn't have to wait for some emotional service or experience. It happens this afternoon, maybe tomorrow morning. It happens when we turn that love for God more and more intentionally into greater action to make Christ known and felt all around us. It starts in our heart, and then that energy flows into all we are and all that we do.

Dear Church,

This Saturday at 6pm in the church yard is our community Bocce event! If you want something different, low key, and competitive, fun, and social this is a great opportunity for you! Join us for some fun.

As we head into the fall please be open with your vision and ideas. If something is in your heart that you'd like to jump in with or start up contact the office so we can chat about it. The wholeness of faith is experienced when we tap into our passions and gifts and then use them to love and serve God by loving and serving one another. As we'll see in Sunday's message, being neutral moves us nowhere and in fact makes us vulnerable to be pushed in any direction the world around us pushes.

Join us Sunday morning as we gather for worship and more. We celebrate Holy Communion and will look into a key component of genuine revival.

***Blessings,
Brent***