



DEVOTIONS

by

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Methodist Conference 2022

Morning Worship: The Holy Spirit in Revival

Monday | The Holy Spirit in Revival: Presence & Power

Call to worship

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

Song: StF 18 v. 1

(Musicians play an instrumental verse before and after the sung verse for prayerful reflection)

**Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;
Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.**

Bible Reading - John 14:15-21

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.' (John 14:15-21)

A Word from John Wesley

Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother Charles were present at our love-feast at Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty we broke out with one voice: "We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord." (John Wesley, *Journal*, 1 January 1739.)

Reflection

The theme for our Conference Morning Worship this week is 'The Holy Spirit in Revival'. Each day, we will hear words from the Bible, and words from Wesley, as we explore the theme together. Our focus this morning is 'Presence and Power'.

Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them as orphans. Instead, he would send the Holy Spirit who would be 'Another Advocate': two words which contain an eternity of meaning.

The latter word, which comes to us in English as 'Advocate', is manifold in meaning and has been translated in many ways: a Comforter who helps us find strength when we are weak; a Counsellor who offers wisdom when we do not know which way to turn; an Advocate who stands alongside us in our defence. The Holy Spirit is all this, and more, to the followers of Jesus.

The former word, 'Another' is equally important. It reminds us that the Holy Spirit is, to each follower of Jesus in every time and place, all that Jesus was to his first disciples: the very presence of God himself.

As we reflect upon our theme for this week's morning worship, 'The Holy Spirit in Revival', we rejoice in the continual, gentle presence of the Holy Spirit who is always with us: before us, beside us, behind us, most importantly within us. Without the Spirit, we can do nothing.

Our very existence as the Methodist Church, with our heritage reaching back to the Wesley brothers and their friends, is testament to another experience of the Holy Spirit. Always gently and graciously present, at times the Holy Spirit crashes in waves upon God's people as a tsunami in Revival.

One great characteristic of Revival is a powerful sense of the presence of God. Such was the experience of Wesley, as we have heard from this morning's Word from Wesley. A little over seven months after his heart-warming experience in Aldersgate Street, he gathered with friends to see in the New Year at Fetter Lane, as the year turned from 1738 to 1739. It was an all-night prayer meeting. At 3 o'clock in the morning, as they continued in prayer, Wesley records in his journal, 'the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground'.

It was nothing less, Wesley reflects, than the presence of 'His Majesty' – the King of Creation himself. There was nothing they could do but worship. As they recovered from this charismatic experience, these good Prayer Book Anglicans expressed their praise in the words of the *Te Deum*: 'We praise Thee, O God; we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.'

The waves of revival had come crashing down upon these shores. This renewed sense of the Presence of God and the Power of the Holy Spirit would propel Wesley towards Kingswood in Bristol, where he would famously preach to the miners in the open air, to great effect.

This revival heritage is our heritage too. Let us pray this Conference for a renewed desire for revival amongst our people and for waves of the Holy Spirit to come crashing down upon our shores today with his Presence and his Power.

Prayer

As we turn to the Lord this morning and lay this day's business before him, let us pray, inspired by the words of our forebears at the conclusion of the famous Liverpool Conference of 1820:

Sovereign God, we are deeply aware that, in seeking the revival and extension of your work, the great thing to be desired is an abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit on ourselves and our families, our Societies and our Congregations. We solemnly, humbly and earnestly pray for that blessing; grant us the desire to 'continue with one accord in prayer and supplication' 'until the Spirit be poured upon us

from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest'. This we ask for your glory alone, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord; **Amen.**

Song: StF 451 'Open the eyes of my heart, Lord'

Prayer, said by all:

**Give us, O God, a vision of your glory,
that we may worship you in spirit and in truth,
and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts;
through Jesus Christ our Lord and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Tuesday | The Holy Spirit in Revival: Penitence & Purity

Call to worship

Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Song: StF 18 v. 2

(Musicians play an instrumental verse before and after the sung verse for prayerful reflection)

**Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.**

Bible Reading - Acts 3:13-15, 17-26

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses ...

'And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out from the people." And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, "And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed." When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.' (Acts 3:13-15, 17-26)

A Word from John Wesley

We met at Fetter Lane, to humble ourselves before God, and own He had justly withdrawn His Spirit from us for our manifold unfaithfulness. We acknowledged our having grieved Him by our divisions: 'one saying, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos'; by our leaning again to our own works, and trusting in them, instead of Christ; by our resting in those little beginnings of sanctification which it had pleased Him to work in our souls; and, above all, by blaspheming His work among us, imputing it either to nature, to the force of imagination and animal spirits, or even to the delusion of the devil. In that hour we found God with us as at the first. Some fell prostrate upon the ground; others burst out, as with one consent, into loud praise and thanksgiving. And many openly testified there had been no such day as this since January the first preceding. (John Wesley, *Journal*, 16 June 1739.)

Reflection

As we ended our reflections yesterday, we left John Wesley on his way to Bristol. He was spurred on by the sense of the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit he had experienced in Fetter Lane at the turning of the year. That April, in his own words, he 'consented to be more vile' and began his ministry of open-air preaching, through which spread the greatest revival these shores have ever known. It was catalysed by the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit.

Our focus today, as we continue to reflect upon our theme of 'The Holy Spirit in Revival' is, 'Penitence and Purity'. In June of that same year, 1739, whilst still in Bristol, Wesley received a letter from his fellow Methodists in London, urging him to return. They sensed the Holy Spirit was not present with them in the way they had known the Spirit's presence before. So Wesley returned to London and the group of friends met again in Fetter Lane, the same place in which they had so memorably seen in the New Year.

This was a meeting marked by penitence. In this morning's Word from Wesley, he described their repentance: of divisions and self-reliance and scepticism and their failure to pursue purity, sanctification – what Wesley would later describe as the *grand depositum* of the People Called Methodists: scriptural holiness. It was in their Penitence and their resolution to pursue Purity that they discovered the presence of the Holy Spirit with them once more. In Wesley's own words: 'In that hour, we found God with us as at the first ... and many openly testified, there had been no such day as this since January the first preceding.'

Our Bible reading contains a beautiful invitation and an equally beautiful promise. In this classic account of the gospel preaching of the Apostles, Peter tells again the story of the God of the Old Testament fulfilling all his promises in Jesus. The invitation is heard in the response for which he calls: 'Repent therefore, and turn to God' and it is met with a promise: 'that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord' as we await his return.

My brothers and sisters, at the beginning of this Conference day, let us approach the throne of grace together in penitence and faith, seeking forgiveness and times of refreshing from the Lord.

Prayer

As we turn to the Lord this morning and lay this day's business before him, let us pray with the words of the Collect for Purity from the Book of Common Prayer, which inspired the Wesley brothers in their doctrine of Perfect Love. As we pray and as we sing, we prepare our hearts for our prayer of confession. So let us pray:

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord; **Amen.**

Song: StF 728 'O God you search me and you know me'

- 1 O God, you search me and you know me.
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
ever the maker and keeper of my days.**
- 2 You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me:
in every moment of life or death, you are.**
- 3 Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too.**
- 4 Although your Spirit is upon me,
still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
even the darkness is radiant in your sight.**
- 5 For you created me and shaped me,
gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
safe in your hands, all creation is made new.**

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957) based on psalm 139

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Prayer, said by all:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Therefore to all who truly repent this is God's gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven.'

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Thursday | The Holy Spirit in Revival: Passion & Persistence

Call to worship

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

Song: StF 18 v. 3

(Musicians play an instrumental verse before and after the sung verse for prayerful reflection)

**Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.**

Bible Reading - Ezekiel 37:1-14

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all round them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, 'Mortal, can these bones live?' I answered, 'O Lord God, you know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, 'Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely." Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.' (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

A Word from John Wesley

As the work of God increases in so many parts both of England and Ireland, it would be strange if there were no increase of it in London; especially while all the Preachers are of one mind, and speak the same thing. Only do not forget strongly and explicitly to urge the believers to "go on to perfection." When this is constantly and earnestly done, the word is always clothed with power. (John Wesley, *Letter to the Rev. Peard Dickinson*, 5 June 1787).

Reflection

Our focus this morning, as we continue our theme of 'the Holy Spirit in Revival' is 'Passion and Persistence'. Throughout the history of the Church, God's people have passionately and persistently prayed for a renewal and revival of the work of God in their own day and age. How can we do any less as we gather for this Methodist Conference, and resolve continually to do as we return to our churches?

Those who have longed for renewal and revival have often found inspiration in Ezekiel's prophetic vision of the valley of dry bones. Looking out at the Christian Church when its work has been at a low ebb, seeing little more than dry bones, they asked in their day – as we might at times ask in ours – 'Can these bones live?' And they turned again to the Sovereign God, with renewed passion and persistence in prayer, that he would breathe once again his breath of life, that what seemed to be nothing but dry bones might once again become a living being; that he would again put his Spirit within his people.

There has been much debate across the whole Christian Church over what we are to expect of the work of the Holy Spirit in this age. Wesley was clear: the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit are to be expected in the present age, just as much as they were in the earliest days of the Church. In this morning's Word from Wesley, we heard an extract from a letter to one of his protégés. Wesley relates the growth of gospel work in many parts of England and Ireland, and he seems to tackle a question concerning the increase, or lack of it, in London. He would expect the preaching of the gospel to be clothed with power there also, so long as the preachers continue 'strongly and explicitly to urge the believers to go on to perfection'.

It was Donald English, the world-renowned Methodist Minister and only President of the Conference to hold office twice, who once stated that it was the early Methodist's holiness that gave them their power: not that they *claimed* to be holy, but they *longed* to be holy.

That seems to have been Wesley's view too. Reflecting on the purpose of the Methodist movement which had grown under his ministry, he asked the question, 'What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?' and answered, 'To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.'

So, let us not forget our *raison d'être*. Let us passionately and persistently seek a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a revival, that would see our mission and ministry once again clothed with power from on high.

Prayer

As we turn to the Lord this morning and lay this day's business before him, let us pray, inspired by the words of the prophet Habakkuk:

O Lord, we have heard of your renown, and stand in awe of your work. In our own time revive it; in our own time make it known. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer. Amen.**

Song: StF 386 'In the beginning was darkness and nothing'

Hymn: StF 386 'In the beginning was darkness and nothing'

**Breathe on me O breath of God and fill me with life anew.
Breathe on me O breath of God and set this heart on fire for you.**

**1 In the beginning was darkness and nothing;
your Spirit was moving over the deep.
You spoke a whisper and creation existed,
birthed by the mighty words that you speak.**

Just say the word and my weary soul will be renewed.

**Breathe on me O breath of God and fill me with life anew.
Breathe on me O breath of God and set this heart on fire for you.**

**2 Bones in a valley were changed into an army,
raised by your Spirit's powerful touch.
Here in your presence I'm needing your refreshing;
Lord please revive my heart with your love.**

Just say the word and my weary soul will be renewed.

Breathe on me O breath of God ...

**Revival fire, fall down like the rain.
Revival fire, set my soul ablaze.
Revival fire, fall down like the rain.
Revival fire, set my soul ablaze.**

Breathe on me O breath of God ...

Vicky Beeching Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 386

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Prayer, said by all:

**Holy Spirit, sent by the Father,
ignite in us your holy fire;
strengthen your children with the gift of faith,
revive your Church with the breath of love,
and renew the face of the earth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord; Amen.**