

Mountains Were Made to be Moved
Matthew 17: 14-21
October 12, 2008
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A U.S. Lutheran bishop tells of visiting a parish church in California and finding a stirring red and orange banner on the wall. "Come Holy Spirit. Hallelujah!" it declared in words printed under a picture of a fire burning. The bishop was also interested in the sign directly underneath the banner which said: "Fire extinguisher."

I'm ready for the Holy Spirit. I'm ready for a revival. Not one that necessarily includes Barack Obama or John McCain. Not one that divides between the left and the right. Not one that is strictly about evangelicals and not one that is strictly about social justice.

I'm ready for a revival. Not one that depends on human institutions or presidential candidates. I'm ready for a revival that stands alone on the principles of the Kingdom of God. Principles that echo the prophet Micah's call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

I'm ready for a revival. I'm ready for the kind the prophet Amos spoke about when he preached, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

I'm ready for a revival. One that will call us back to who we are as a people of God, one that echoes Amos' call in a time when there was great separation between the rich and the poor. I'm ready for a revival that calls us back to Jesus' words in Matthew 25 when he speaks about feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, caring for the sick, visiting those in prison...when he said, "When you do this to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me."

I'm ready for a revival: one that calls us to repentance for turning away from injustice. I'm ready for a revival that won't come from the left side of the aisle or the right side of the aisle: A revival that won't come strictly from the north, south, east or west. I'm ready for what Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourner's* magazine and author of "God's Politics," calls a "justice revival." I had a chance to hear Wallis last week when some of us went to the leadership institute at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City. His words had a profound impact on me. Some of what I say today will echo his thoughts from last week.

I'm ready for a revival, but not one that's just about our inner self (or about eternity). Many times, spiritual activity is kept on the inside. Many times it is perceived as it's all about how I'm feeling or all about my soul and salvation. On the evangelical side, we often hear that faith is a private matter. On the other side, we are that faith is all about doing good. That side says it is less about the

inner and more about what we do. I wonder if there is a middle ground? Wallis said, “Why would we restrict God to just changing our inner lives? Indeed, faith is personal, but it is never private.

John Wesley said, “The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. It has a lot to do with us working out our faith in the world. So, I’m ready for a revival. Social movements have spiritual foundations. William Wilberforce didn’t begin his crusade to abolish the slave trade in England until his conversion to Christianity. One of the main leaders in defeating Apartheid in South Africa was a Bishop – Desmond Tutu. The majority of the Civil Rights campaign was born out of a religious idea that we are all made in the image of God. Obviously, one of the key persons was a minister of the Gospel. It wasn’t the government. Who knows where the reconciling movement will lead us in the future.

I’m ready for a revival. However, spiritual activity doesn’t become a revival until it changes society. That means revival and repentance take on new meaning. It means we ask questions about our priorities, our stewardship, and our habits. As the people of God, we serve the Kingdom of God...and that Kingdom wants to change the world.

I do not believe this is a pie-in-the-sky or utopian view of things. I believe it is found in the scriptures. Change can happen. Change comes from a revival of who we are – change comes from acknowledging that we must move from a seated church to a missional church. That does not mean it comes easy. We’ve got some mountains in front of us. Lest we forget, look at the disparity between those who have and those who have not. Look at the staggering numbers of poverty (not just in the world or country, but in our own city). 30,000 children are dying every day because of diseases that are preventable. Homelessness is still an issue the church is struggling to combat. Now it’s not just in the city, but it is now hitting the suburbs in this economic crisis. You add the issue of immigration laws and human trafficking and we’ve got some mountains in front of us.

Where are the prophets like Jeremiah, Micah and Amos? Where is the Spirit that has left us seated and arguing about whether this candidate or that candidate will move the mountains that need to be moved? Unfortunately, the Kingdom of God will not be on the ballot on November 4.

But because faith is personal, we can, as Ghandi said, “be the change we want in the world.” Because it is social, we, the church, can lead our neighborhoods to a revival of justice. We’ve got mountains, but revival movements are mountain-moving movements.

Jesus ushered in a revival, but there were moments when the disciples could not see over the mountains. In this morning’s text, Jesus has been up on the mountain for the transfiguration. As he comes back down, he can see a crowd gathered around. A man comes to him probably shaken and desperate. He asked them to heal his son who probably has something like epilepsy. The disciples

tried, but they could not heal the boy. Jesus becomes frustrated with the disciples and says, “you faithless and perverse generation.” He proceeded to heal the boy. Later on, the disciples ask why they couldn’t do it, and Jesus simply says it is because they don’t have enough faith. He then gives his famous line, “I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you’” (Matthew 17:21 NRSV).

If only it were that easy. Faith. What is faith? The writer of Hebrews says “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV). The assurance of things hoped for. Last week, Jim Wallis told those of us gathered that in other words, it is “believing in spite of the evidence, then watching the evidence change!” Jesus might have said, it is “believing in spite of the mountain that stands before you, then watching the mountain move.”

But do mountains just move on their own? We live in a city where some individuals believe they can move mountains themselves. They believe they are powerful enough, strong enough, smart enough, and they know enough people that they will get a mountain moved. I guess sometimes it happens. Often it’s not the kind of mountain that we would be talking about. I do happen to believe we are the vessels that God wants to use to move mountains. First, we have to lay aside our self-motivated desires and ask ourselves challenging questions. We take inventory of our priorities.

Once we repent of those ways (the very ways Jesus speaks of), then we can begin to change directions. A change in direction will cause a movement – dare I say a revival? A revival of mountain moving Kingdom principles? Last week, Jim Wallis challenged us to look beyond November 4 (I’m not saying don’t vote because that is important too). He said the real choice is between hope and cynicism. Cynicism is real, but it keeps us from committing to doing something about the mountains that stand before us.

Hope is also real. I want to choose hope. After all, hope found in the Gospel, in the good news of Jesus who said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they – will – be – filled.”

History shows us that it is ordinary people in movements of faith that create a revival. These movements are generally from the bottom up. These movements move politicians. Wallis says, “Lyndon Johnson wasn’t a leader in the Civil Rights movement until Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. made him one.”

As a community of faith, let us respond to God’s call for compassion, justice and righteousness. Let us begin to bring about a change from the bottom up. As a part of that call, I encourage you to come back next week. It’s Help the Homeless Sunday. Dr. Parker will be digging deeper into this topic

– giving us specifics on how we can move mountains by the grace of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to come back and bring someone with you. Let's fill this place with those who are hungry and thirsty for justice and righteousness. I challenge you to bring your walking shoes and join us for our annual Tyler Rusch Memorial Walk (if you are able to) to raise money to combat the injustice of homelessness. I also challenge you to bring some items from the list you see printed in the bulletin. The youth have been collecting these items as a response to the Community Council for the Homeless at Friendship Place's call to help formerly homeless people who have now been provided a home, get started. We'll have collection points in the entrance downstairs and in the Narthex.

I challenge you to come and be ready to respond to God's call in your life. One of the more inspiring moments from last week is when Jim Wallis shared a story with us about being in South Africa at the height of the movement against apartheid. He was joining Bishop Desmond Tutu and others in a worship service that Tutu was leading. The South African army was watching everything. They had orders to arrest those who were speaking out. As the service got underway and Bishop Tutu began to speak, members of the army came in with their guns and began to line the walls. Wallis said he crouched down in his seat and thought not so good things. He said what happened next was amazing and inspiring. Bishop Tutu was at the pulpit and he dropped his head as if in prayer. He said he looked up and began to do sort of a dance across the stage. He looked at the soldiers, laughed and said, "you – have – already – lost...you might as well come over to the winning side."

I'm ready for a revival. Let us be prisoners of hope, and let mountains be moved.
Amen.