

For the past couple of weeks there is a feeling I get every Sunday morning starting at 8:00 A.M.. As a pastor and mother my weeks are always full of changed plans, but I could always count on knowing what I was doing on Sunday morning... spending time at all three churches with each of you. So, I think the feeling I am experiencing is a longing to be together. I long to be back in our beautiful sanctuaries and worshipping alongside each of you.

Maybe you can relate. I know many of you are longing to be back at church...are longing to see your family and friends in person and are longing to get out of the house!

It is strange worshipping from home on Sunday when we are used to being together. We long to return to our time of fellowship, but I also think that we are longing to embody holiness together before God.

Holiness is the pattern of our lives in which we worship God.

Some of these patterns may have changed for us over these past couple of weeks, but the good news for our lives today is that we can continue to practice patterns of holiness even when we are apart and unable to go to church.

One of the beautiful things about being a Methodist is that we have a method for everything including holiness.

In fact, John Wesley and his friends earned their name “Methodists” through the way that they embodied practices of holiness each week. In his book “Revival” Adam Hamilton outlined the practices of holiness that got the Methodists their name: “They actively pursued acts of compassion and mercy for the poor, the prisoners, and the elderly, and they sought to achieve lives of simplicity.”ⁱ

At first this term “Methodists” was a derogatory name, but John Wesley thought it was fitting so he went with it. Hamilton’s book “Revival” shows us that the first rise of Methodism did not happen in a mega church or in the most peaceful of circumstances.

It happened while a small group of their friends were trying to figure out who they were and what God was calling them to do. Hamilton shares about the “first rise of Methodism” he says: “Wesley’s ministry at Oxford never had large numbers of students involved, but the small numbers who were involved birthed a movement that changed the world.”ⁱⁱ

So, Methodism began with a couple of guys who were trying to be more holy together all for the glory of God.

This is wonderfully encouraging news for our three small churches because this small group of people were able to create something together with God that impacted the entire world.

It makes me wonder what God will have us do together that can change the community and the world.

The beautiful thing about practicing holiness is that it impacts our spiritual lives and the lives of others and it all starts with God.

We strive for lives of holiness because we strive to be more like God. Psalm 115:1 encourages us to remember that our faith has more to do with God than ourselves: “Not to us, but to your name be the glory.”

Our scripture for today from 1 Peter reminds us that God’s people have always been working on practicing holiness. 1 Peter 1:15-16 reads: “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

So how can we strive for holiness during these uncertain times? In our humanity it is easy for us to let things slip especially when our schedules change or life gets harder, but this is the very time we should be turning towards God.

God calls us to order our lives of faith through holiness of heart and life.

What is holiness of heart?

Simply put holiness of heart is the way we order our personal lives and practices to mirror God.

Holiness of heart happens in the moments when we choose to love God over loving ourselves.

And yet, in the methods of practicing holiness, we are at risk of simply following the rules instead of “...engaging in a deep relationship with the God of creation.”ⁱⁱⁱ

You see, there is a difference in believing with your mind and believing with your heart and both have to be married in order to have a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ.

In my practice of ministry for ten years I have seen many people be motivated to do practices of holiness through obligation. They feel like they must do these things to be faithful, but I am not always sure they are enjoying the things they are doing or if they are growing spiritually.

The goal of holiness is to become more like God through the practices we do and we can even find joy in these practices.

So, what is your favorite practice of personal holiness of heart? Is it reading the Bible or praying, or walking outside to be with God in nature? Is it meditation or journaling?

What is it that helps you feel connected to God and that you are growing in your faith?

For me during this pandemic I have really taken to spiritual journaling. This really helps me process my thoughts, feeling, and faith. This has been a healing practice for me, and it has also helped me vision about the ministry to which our churches are called now and in the future.

The beautiful thing about holiness of heart is that it carries us out into the world to practice holiness of life.

Our lectionary Scripture for today is about the road to Emmaus found in Luke 24. Here we find two disciples of Jesus Christ longing to be with Him. Along the way Jesus joins them, but they are unable to recognize that it is him.

They tell this “new friend” who Jesus Christ was, but they still do not recognize him until the moment that he breaks bread in front of them and then he vanishes. In the breaking of the bread their eyes were opened to the resurrected Christ.

As we continue on in this third week of Easter, we are still celebrating the resurrected Christ. After these two friends recognized Christ they told their friends “...Christ has risen indeed...(Luke 24:34).

We embody holiness of life when we embody this truth with our lives. These are the ways we enact our faith. We embody holiness of life when we love our neighbors more than ourselves.

In our communion liturgy we too experience again the breaking of the bread, symbolic for the same way Christ broke his body so that we may have new life.

At the end of the communion liturgy we hear this blessing: “Pour out your Holy Spirit on us...and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood.”^{iv}

In this moment of breaking the bread and blessing it we become the body of Christ for the world. We take on the mission of Jesus Christ, the mission to share that we too have seen the resurrected Christ alive and well in the world.

This is what revival is about. It is about taking what we know to be true about God in our hearts and sharing it with the world.

Holiness of life can take on many forms but are especially apparent when we embody the fruit of the Spirit as outlined in Galatians 5. Every time we practice “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” out in public our lives more closely align to our creator (Galatians 5:22-23a).

I see these fruits of the Spirit in Darcy Johnson carrying on the ministry of the Senior Center. I see them in Mimi Forbes continuing the ministry of the Food Pantry. I see it in our police officers who continue to call seniors each week to check in. I see them in the Preschool children who write cards to those whose families cannot visit them.

I see faith in action through Rosa Crocker, Candy Lama, Mary Frances Bywaters, and so many other people in our congregation who are making face masks to save lives.

None of us asked for this pandemic, but during this time of simplicity we are given the opportunity to grow in our faith individually and communally.

The good news for our lives today is that God will make us holy as we center our lives on loving God and our neighbors.

So, what practices of holiness is God calling you to continue or try? This week you may want to try something new. Maybe try doing a meditative prayer walk outside or try journaling.

Drop some toilet paper off to the Food Pantry and say it is from the church.

There are so many ways to embody holiness of heart and life.

As we continue forward in this time of revival may we be excited and fulfilled to embody holiness as God is holy. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ Adam Hamilton. “Revival: Faith as Wesley Lives It.” Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. P.

ⁱⁱ Ibid. P. 45.

ⁱⁱⁱ Catherine Newberry Davis. Dissertation for Doctorate. “Holiness of Heart and Life in the Twenty-First Century.”

<https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1049&context=dmin>

^{iv} “The United Methodist Hymnal.” United Methodist Publishing House. Nashville, TN. 1989. P. 14.

Additional Resource

Keck et al. The New Interpreter’s Commentary of the Bible. Vol. XII. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.