



BelPres Church

Holy Discontent

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Well, thank you all for being here. Thank you for those of you who are joining us online, for joining us, appreciate that. Those of you in the room, thanks for being here and worshipping with us. There's a saying that some of you may have heard, and it goes like this, and you can see it on the graph there. Up at the top, hard times create strong people. Strong people create good times.

Good times create weak people. Weak people create hard times. Rinse, repeat. And just in case you're wondering, you are here. Or at least it feels like that sometimes, right? Like wars in Iran and Ukraine and Gaza and Congo, economic uncertainty, unemployment, political divisions. It just feels heavy sometimes, doesn't it? It just feels heavy. So where do we find hope?

Who's going to be our captain that's going to guide us through these stormy seas? Well, we're starting a new sermon series called Holy Spirit Unleashed about what happens when large numbers of people really open themselves up to the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is Jesus Spirit living inside of us, giving us power and courage and hope and direction.

And when large numbers of people really yield their life to the guidance and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, when lots of people start to do that, traditionally that has been called revival, which I know for some of us maybe conjures up images of like tent meetings and traveling preachers and that sort of thing. And that's not what we're going to be talking about in this series.

We're going to talk a little bit more about there have been these times in history where there have been transformational revivals that lasted for years and left things better off than when they started.

Beginning in Acts chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' followers and from there, the Jesus movement grew 40 percent per decade for 300 years. That's a long revival. And it changed the Roman Empire completely.

Throughout the Middle Ages, there were various outpourings of the Holy Spirit. There was a transformational revival in Wales in the early 1900s. In US history, there was the first great awakening in the 1700s, the second great awakening in the 1800s, the Azusa Street Revival in the early 1900s. And right now, we are experiencing one of the greatest revivals in history, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Not so much here, in North America or in Europe, but even here and even in Europe, there is a small but hopefully growing trend that young people, particularly young men between the ages of 18 and 30, are coming to Jesus in numbers we haven't seen in a very long time. So hopefully that keeps going. And all of these historical transformational revivals have some things in common, like large numbers of people coming to Jesus. That's kind of the basic definition of revival.

A lot of people start having intense emotional experience of Jesus' presence. That can be in outward displays of emotion or more quietly on the inside. Social healing is part of these revivals. You can draw a straight line from the Second Great Awakening to the abolition of slavery. Without the Second Great Awakening, abolition probably would have taken a lot longer. Racial justice was a big part of the Azusa Street Revival, where black and white people worshiped together and shared power and made decisions together.

Prison reform, child labor reform, rights for women, and the temperance movement, which was originally a social healing movement, all came from revivals. And then finally, all of these transformational revivals include signs, wonders, and miracles. Now, all of these historical revivals, they had flaws, they made mistakes, they were not perfect, but they moved things forward for the better, and they brought hope into a hopeless world.

So, in our current place, as people, and as a nation, and as a world, might could we use a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our own lives and in the

life of our country? So, that's what we're going to talk about for the next few weeks, drawing from the Bible as well as drawing from lessons from history. And transformational revival comes from the Holy Spirit, not from us. Like, we can't gin it up.

We can't make it happen. But we can either facilitate it or we can block it. The Bible says, do not quench the Spirit. God's never going to force us to do anything. He respects our free will. But if we try to control things too much, including our emotions and including our public image, if we try to control things too much, if we don't follow the nudges of the Holy Spirit, if we think we know how to do things better than God does, so we're going to do it our way, because after all, we have all this expertise, we have all this experience, we have all this common sense, this is how you do something, if we do those things, we leash the Holy Spirit. But when the Holy Spirit is unleashed, revival breaks out in our own lives and in our world, as many of you know, because many of you are filled with the Holy Spirit and have been for years and years and years. And one of the things the Holy Spirit stirs in us, and often that precedes transformational revivals, is holy discontent. Holy discontent, where people get fed up with the status quo and they long for something different.

The Great Awakening was preceded by an intense discontent with the overly intellectual style and the traditionalism of the established churches that had lost their spiritual vigor. Discontent about Jim Crow preceded the Azusa Street Revival. Revival start with holy discontent, emphasis on the holy. Because there's a lot of discontent right now, right? But I'm not sure it's holy. Just being ticked off about something does not count as holy discontent. That's just regular old human discontent, which often leads to division and cynicism and despair, maybe even violence. So then what is holy discontent? Well, if you have a Bible, turn to Isaiah chapter 64. Isaiah chapter 64, and you can use the table of contents for that.

There are Bibles around the room. If you want to grab one, you can grab a Bible, or you can just follow along on the screen. And the context for this is that the nation of Israel had strayed far from God. They were worshipping pagan gods, false gods. They were pursuing just their own comfort, just their own prosperity, all of which weakened their society until the Babylonian Empire conquered them. So that's the content, the context of Isaiah 64. Isaiah 64 verse 1. Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you. So the first thing about holy discontent is it leads us to a passionate plea.

Oh, that you would rend the heavens. The word rend means to tear apart. In the original Hebrew, this word that this was written, this word was often used to describe an animal tearing into its prey. It's an intense word. It's even a violent word. Isaiah doesn't say, Oh, that you would gently lay aside the heavens and gently trickle down. Oh, that you would tear the sky apart. We are desperate. We have messed things up in a major way. Rip the sky in two, God, and come down. Verse two, as when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, again, intense imagery.

Come down, second time he uses that phrase, to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you. For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, third time, using that phrase, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times, no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you who acts on behalf of those who wait for them. So a second thing about holy discontent is it leads us to conclude that our only hope is Jesus. Isaiah says, no eye has seen, no ear has heard any God like you. And Isaiah is referencing the false gods, the Israelites who are worshiping gods with names like Baal and Astra and things like that.

But it also applies to our false gods that go by the names of money, popularity, physical attractiveness, sex, success, politics, political power. Holy discontent says, been there, done that, bought the t-shirt, tried all those things, and they've all failed. Politics matters, it's important, but it is not our ultimate hope. It will let us down. We often see money as a source of security, but we know, we all know, it can be taken away. One good recession, one good dip in the Dow Jones, right? And it's gone, and we know that.

So this thing that was supposed to make us feel secure, actually we just end up worrying about whether or not we have enough of it. It doesn't lead to security. Three times, in three verses, Isaiah uses the phrase, come down to help us. So question, what god in any religion has ever left heaven where there is no suffering to come down to earth to suffer in order to help us? What god in any religion ever rent the heavens and came down? Like you're in a church.

The answer is always Jesus. Just whatever the question is, what's your favorite color? Jesus, right? The answer is Jesus. Buddha didn't do that for us. Muhammad didn't do that for us. Our money doesn't do that for us. Our skills don't do that for us. Our public image doesn't do that for us.

Democrats don't do that for us. Republicans don't do that for us. Holy discontent leads us to conclude that the god who came down to help us in the person of Jesus is our only hope.

And there is no other. Not our skill, not our expertise, not our wealth, not our perfect plans. Only Jesus can fix the mess we've made. Verse 5. You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember your ways, but... Uh-oh, there's a but. Buts are always a problem. But when we continue to sin against them, your ways, your commands, you were angry. So here's another thing. Holy discontent leads us to realize God's ways are better than ours. God's commands are not meant to wreck our lives and keep us from having fun. They're meant to help us thrive.

And Isaiah says when we disobey them, when we break God's commands, when we don't do things God's way, it makes him angry because our sin hurts people that he loves, including ourselves, and that makes him angry. Holy discontent leads us to think maybe we don't have the answers. Maybe our ways don't actually work. Maybe we should give God's ways a chance. Maybe we should give God's ways a chance for once.

And we'll get more specific about what some of those ways are in future sermons, but for this sermon, just for this sermon, for now, I think the most important thing for us to have holy discontent about is holy discontent for doing things our way, not God's. Like if you watch how we live, and this includes me, this includes me, we really do think we know better how to run our lives than God does, and run our world better than God does. We're capable people.

We've accomplished a lot of things, and we just keep doing things our way instead of relying on God's power and doing things His way. We do this as a church. You've heard me joke before that maybe our mission statement should be BelPres. God can do it. We can help. Because that's how a lot of us, and I'm including me, live our lives. God is there to empower my life plan, not to tell me how to live. He's there to empower my life plan. We don't say that out loud, but that's kind of how we live.

Our idolatry of politics shows that we really do think our ultimate hope isn't Jesus. It's electing the right people. And by the way we behave, we really do think that's the most important thing we can do, right? And it's creating a mess.

Verse 6. All of us, all of us have become like one who is unclean. Okay, that seems like an exaggeration. Like, really? All of us? Like, really? Like, does all of us include me? Like, I'm a pastor, so surely I get a pass on this sort of thing, right? Like, does all of us include me? This is the thing. Wow, aren't you judgmental, Sergio? Like, dang, so cold. Yeah, all of us includes me. Second question, does all of us include you? Uh-huh, it does. Holy discontent leads us to realize I am part of the problem. When writer GK Chesterton was asked, what's the problem in the world? He said, I am.

I'm the problem in the world. See, human discontent leads us to say, I'm not the problem, those people are the problem. Those people who vote differently than me, those people who look different than me, those people who came from a different place than me, those people who are richer than me, those people who are poorer than me, they're the problem. But holy discontent leads us to say, yet again, in the wise words of Taylor Swift, who I've quoted before, it's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me. Yeah, you can applaud for Taylor Swift. She's got some good stuff.

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. And the language there is very strong. In the original Hebrew, it means menstrual rags. But even my good deeds are sometimes just me virtue signaling to impress other people by how good I am. And it's part of what's wrong with the world. When I participate in a culture of consumerism, I am perpetuating the keep up with the Joneses hamster wheel, where I see what other people have and I want to keep up with them. They see what I've got, they want to keep up with me.

Round and round it goes, and pretty soon we're all stressed out trying to keep up with each other. When I vent my anger on social media, I am contributing to the toxic divisions in our culture. It's me.

Hi. I'm the problem. It's me. Now, that's not meant to make us feel guilty. Jesus died to pay the price for our sins, so that if we know him, if we know him, we are forgiven and freed of guilt. It's not about guilt. It's about diagnosing the problem correctly, so we can fix it. And revival begins when we all start to realize, I am part of the problem, and I need the Holy Spirit to change me, to be more like Jesus, so I can be a change agent in his world. Holy discontent leads to a passionate plea, a realization Jesus is our only hope, that God's ways are better than ours, and I am part of the problem. That last one is kind of depressing, isn't it? Aren't you glad you came to church today? Well, look at verse eight. Look at verse eight. Yet, yet, yet is a hopeful word.

Yet is a good things are coming word. Yet is it doesn't have to be this way word. Yet you, Lord, are our father. We are the clay, you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand. You are a good father. And if we just yield ourselves to you, the way the clay yields to the potter, you will make beautiful things happen in us, and you will make beautiful things happen through us in your world. Human discontent often leads to anger, despair, division, but holy discontent leads us to hope in Jesus. Skip down to the very last line of this chapter.

And remember, the original Bible had no chapter divisions, no verse divisions, it was all one continuous scroll. It all ran together. Last line of chapter 64, will you keep silent and punish us beyond measure? Very next verse, I revealed my God speaking, I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me, I was found by those who did not seek me, to a nation that did not call on my name, I said, here am I, here am I. He says it twice for emphasis. God is always saying, I'm here, I'm here, you can't see me because you're walking away from me, turn around, I'm here. Skip down to verse eight.

This is what the Lord says, as when juice is still found in a cluster of grapes, and people say, don't destroy it, there's still a blessing in it, so I will do on behalf of my servants. In other words, things are never so dry, things are never so barren that God can't bring blessing out of it. If we turn from our ways and turn to God and do things his way, he says, I will revive, I will restore you, and not just personally. Look at verse 10. Sharon will become a pasture for flocks in the valley of Acre, a resting place for herds for my people who seek me.

These two places, he said, they're going to be green again, they're going to be revived, they're going to be restored. In other words, he won't just revive us as individuals, but through us, he's also going to revive neighborhoods, and schools, and workplaces, and cities, and countries, and our world. Years ago, I visited a small church that was doing big things. And it had been a very spiritually dead church, just a handful of people. It was dying, it was dwindling, worship was about as exciting as elevator music, which is an insult to elevator music. I mean, it was just a dead church. And then they got a new pastor who had formerly been a chaplain in the military. And he had noticed that when people who go to church were dying, they were just as afraid as everyone else who was dying. And he thought, well, if they know Jesus, that shouldn't be the case. What's wrong with our churches that this is happening?

And it created in him a holy discontent, which sent him on a spiritual search that led him to having some very intense emotional experiences with the Holy Spirit that left him different and changed how he did ministry. He realized there's a difference between going to church and being a disciple of Jesus who is becoming like Jesus. So they started to do some things differently in their church. The most important thing is they started doing a weekly prayer meeting where they just prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed, calling on the Holy Spirit passionately, desperately. We are out of options. Revive us. And at first, the prayer meetings were small, but they began to grow and grow and grow.

And then there was just this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, where people started to have more emotionally intense experiences of Jesus in worship, as well as in their own individual prayer life. And as that happened, there was this new energy and this new life in the church again. And as that happened, they began to see the neighborhood around the church with different eyes. They began to look at that neighborhood with holy discontent, because it was an under-resourced neighborhood, a lot of drugs, a lot of crime.

And then the Holy Spirit just nudged this one woman in the church, gave her a vision to build a health clinic in that neighborhood for people who didn't have insurance. But that costs a lot of money. So she gathered some people around her to pray and to pray and to pray. And after two years of praying, this is a true story, one of the other people in that group that was praying for this had a great aunt who died and left her several million dollars. And this woman that got this is she wasn't wealthy. In fact, she was kind of struggling financially, and that money could have changed her life. But she gave every penny of it to build the health clinic. You want to hear about miracles?

How many people suddenly get several million dollars and could change their life and give it all away? But see, the Holy Spirit was moving so powerfully in her life, and she knew that Jesus was real, not just an idea, and she trusted him to provide for her needs. The way of the world, the way of common sense says, keep it, or at least keep most of it, and just give some of it, because you need that, this will help you. That's the way of the world. But she didn't want to do things the world's way, she wanted to do things Jesus' way, so she gave it all away. Which inspired others to give to it, including corporations to give money for that health clinic, and so they built it.

But the Holy Spirit didn't stop there. No, no, no. There was another group in that church that started a drug recovery center. The church also created a job training and placement center, and a coffee shop with really good coffee, where people who didn't know about Jesus could come and hang out and hear about Jesus, and a lot of them started giving their lives to Jesus. This one little church has transformed several blocks around them into a neighborhood where everyone knows everyone, everyone is caring for each other. If someone gets sick or has a baby, neighbors help out. Crime in that neighborhood evaporated. New businesses opened, which generated employment. There was just this outpouring of the Holy Spirit that had an inward transformation for the people in that church that then moved outward to establish justice and community and social healing. That's revival in its fullest form, an inward transformation that has an external component. And what if more churches did that? That's just one church.

What if more churches did that? How might that change our country? How might that change our world? You want hope? There it is. You want hope? It's in that. It's not in DC. It's not in Olympia. It's not in our skills or our money or our know-how. It's in Jesus' Holy Spirit reviving us to revive his world. So, what do we do? In light of all this, what do we do? Well, that is the kind of question I always ask, right? That is such a me question. Frankly, that's such a BelPres question. Let's do something. Who cares what? Let's just go do something, right? Well, we are doing things, and we will keep doing things, and we will do more things.

But for right now, the most important thing we could do is pray. Is pray. Every transformational revival in history did not start with a strategic plan. It did not start with a task force. Every transformational revival in history started with a prayer meeting. Revivals are birthed in prayer. Pray that Jesus give you holy discontent. Not just mad about something, not your political anger gussied up as Jesus' anger, but holy discontent that leads you to do things his way, not our way. Pray that Jesus turn your anger or your cynicism or your despair into holy discontent. And you know what? If you're here today, and you're not even sure Jesus is real, or you feel like Jesus let you down, well, then you pray that Jesus revive you, so that you can be someone who revives others.

You can pray by yourself, pray in your community group, get prayer after the service. It would be so great if we had a line every week after the services of people waiting to get prayed for that the Holy Spirit would be unleashed in our lives.

Because we do not have to settle for spiritual lethargy. We do not have to give in to despair because of the state of our own lives or of our city, of our country, of our world. Jesus can. Jesus has. Jesus will do exceedingly, abundantly, beyond all we can ask or even imagine according to what? According to our power? According to our skill set? According to what we know how to do? Uh-uh. According to the power that is at work within us. And that power has a name. It's called the Holy Spirit. And if we just finally give up and say, our way isn't working, Lord, we're gonna give your way a try. I surrender my spirit of control. Holy Spirit, have your way with me.

Holy Spirit, have your way with us. As the prophet Hosea says, come, let us return to the Lord. And he will revive us, that we may live in his presence. Let us press on to know the Lord. Because his coming forth is as certain as the dawn. And he will come to us like the rain. Like the spring rain watering the earth, he will come to us like the rain. Holy Spirit, you are welcome here. You are welcome in our hearts. You are welcome in our homes. You are welcome in our workplaces, neighborhoods, schools. You are welcome in our gyms. You are welcome in this church. Fill us with your power. Change us to be more like Jesus. Guide us in your ways. Give us vision for how you want to use us in the world. And give us hope so that we can give it away to a hopeless world. Pray this in the name of Jesus.

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What are some key take aways for you?
- How might you respond this week?

Closing Group Prayer:

Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Take the challenging parts of your conversation to Jesus. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement for the week ahead.