What images come to mind when you hear the word “Revival”? I would guess that for some of our younger folks, the word has little or no meaning. But, for some of you, thoughts of weeklong religious services might come to mind. I remember weeklong “Revivals” from my childhood and young adult years. We would have worship services every night for a week with a guest preacher. It was an annual event, usually sometime in the summer. Sometimes we would even have services during the daytime, too. There would be dinner on the grounds, special music, and, most years, our family would host the guest preacher and our pastor for a meal. When I was in High School and early college, my friend, Melinda McNeil, and I started singing together at “Revivals”. We went to several churches in our area as the Special Music for the services. That was kind of fun. After I became a preacher, I even preached a few “Revivals”. I remember being the guest preacher at a “Revival” at Dearmanville Methodist Church just outside of Anniston when my friend Gary Formby was the pastor there. I am sure the folks at Dearmanville are still talking about that week! It’s only been 25 years!

There are still some churches around that have “Revival Services” – though usually not United Methodist Churches. Occasionally, as I am driving down the road, I will see a sign advertising a “Revival,” but most United Methodist Churches don’t hold “Revival Services” anymore. And those that do usually don’t follow the old pattern of weeklong services. The summer that we moved to Gadsden, I was the guest preacher at a “Revival” at a church in Alexander City. My friend, Mike Densmore, is the pastor there. During the month of August, that church had special services with a guest preacher each Sunday evening. I was one of those preachers. When Mike invited me to come preach, he said that the folks in that little, small town church wouldn’t attend a weeklong “Revival,” but they would come out for a Sunday evening. We had a pretty good crowd there that night.

I couldn’t tell you when the last weeklong “Revival” was here at First Methodist, and, don’t worry, I am not planning one! It is difficult enough with the busy schedules most folks have to get us here once a week much less every night for a week! A “Revival” just doesn’t have the appeal for most folks that it used to have. But, listen to me now. Are you listening? We need revival now more than ever in our spiritual lives. The point of the old time “Revival Services” was to stir people up, to turn up the burner on their spiritual lives. You see, it is easy for us to become complacent about our spiritual lives. It is easy for us to allow the coals to grow cold. It is easy for us to fall into our busy routines and not take opportunities to grow spiritually. Believers need revival on a regular basis, maybe not the “Revival Services” of old, but we do need what those services sought to provide – new life in Christ.

Last week, I was here for the training session of leaders for our “Better Together” small groups that will begin the week of September 11th. Elizabeth Barnett was doing the training. I wish every one of you could have been there to experience the excitement! Of course, “Better Together” will involve our “Downtown Trinity” – First UMC, First Baptist, and First Presbyterian – in six weeks of small groups. What was exciting about Elizabeth’s presentation was her belief that these small groups will have
the power to change people’s lives. She talked about how excited she was to see what
God was going to do through these groups. She never used the word, but she was
talking about “Revival!” We need “Revival” in our spiritual lives – times of refreshing
and renewal, times of kindling and rekindling the fire. We need “Revival” more than
ever in our lives today.

For the past few weeks, I have been preaching under the heading of “Prayer: Live
Richly.” I’ve been focusing on prayer as the relationship between our selves and God.
Prayer is all about relationship with God. And prayer is the basis for “Revival” in our
lives. You may not know the name Jeremiah Lanpier, but he started a “Revival” with
prayer. Here’s the story.

The year was 1857 and the place was the Old Dutch North Church on Fulton Street
in New York City. The site is just a few blocks from where the World Trade Center used
to stand. Old North Church was a dying church. The neighborhood around the church
had changed dramatically. It had once been a thriving, upscale residential
neighborhood. Through the years, the area began to turn from residential to business.
The longtime, stable families in the area began to relocate. They had been the
backbone of the membership of Old North Church. Immigrants and laborers moved in
behind them and the situation looked hopeless. Other churches in the area closed and
the remaining folks at Old North Church decided to relocate the church, but they didn’t
want to just abandon the mostly poor, working people of Fulton Street. They decided to
hire a Lay Missionary to set up a mission to those who lived there. They hired a guy
named Jeremiah Lanpier.

Jeremiah Lanpier began a visitation program trying to reach out to the immigrants
and laborers in the area, but had little success. A few people came to the church for
services, but not enough to make a difference. So, Jeremiah decided to try something
different. He started a weekly noonday prayer service on Wednesdays, and advertised
it heavily among the business people in the area. The idea was that people of faith
would meet for prayer during their lunch hour from 12:00 to 1:00. No speakers, no
agenda, no order of service was planned – just prayer. At the first meeting, Jeremiah
Lanpier sat for ½ hour in the room reserved for the prayer meeting before anyone else
arrived. At 12:30, six men arrived. They agreed to meet again the following week. The
next week, 20 people attended and agreed to meet the next week. The third week, 40
attended and they had to move to a bigger room. That very week, the United States
was rocked by financial disaster. Sound familiar? Banks closed and men were out of
work. Families were going hungry. It was a terrible time. The prayer group continued.
Within a few weeks, there were 3,000 people attending. There were people from all
walks of life – lawyers, doctors, merchants, laborers, messenger boys, mechanics.
Every room in the church was filled – not just one day a week, but every day.

Within six months, 10,000 businessmen gathered daily across New York City. And
the revival spread across America. Other prayer groups sprang up in cities across the
country. A man from Philadelphia who was part of the original six returned home and
started a group. Newspapers picked up the story and other groups formed. Within one
year of that first meeting, it is estimated that 1 million people were converted to Christ!
That began in 1857 and the Fulton Street prayer meeting continues today over 150
years later! Google Fulton Street Prayer meeting and you will get the whole story. If we
want “Revival”, renewal, refreshment in our spiritual lives, we need to pray!
I’ve been leading small groups on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening for the past few weeks looking at Jim Cymbala’s book “When God’s People Pray.” He tells the story of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church in Brooklyn that had a similar revival that began with prayer. Jim and his wife went to Brooklyn to serve this mission church back in the 1970’s or 1980’s. It was in a poor, rundown neighborhood populated by drug users, prostitutes, and homeless people. His congregation was very small, just a few people. One Sunday morning, he stood up to preach and felt such a burden for what was going on in the neighborhood around them that he stopped in the middle of his sermon and invited the folks to join him in prayer. That was the beginning. Now, the Brooklyn Tabernacle touches the lives of thousands of people, and Jim says that their Tuesday night prayer service is the engine that runs all that they do. If we want “Revival”, renewal, refreshment in our spiritual lives, we need to pray!

And yet, prayer is often not high on our list of things to do – either as individuals or as a church. In fact, we don’t pay much attention to the care and feeding of our spiritual lives! Deborah and I have a cat named Gracie. In addition to being a little bit crazy, she insists on eating regularly! Occasionally, she will meet me at the door squalling when I come home, and then tear off running around the house. Sometimes, I am astute enough to realize that there is something not right. I’ll walk into the laundry room then and find her food dispenser empty and her water bowl dry. If we don’t pay attention to the care and feeding of our animals, they tend to get a little crazy on us! We take care of our kids, and we take care of our pets, then we don’t pay too much attention to the care and feeding of our spiritual lives! And then we wonder why our lives are out of whack, why we are not growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. If we want “Revival”, renewal, refreshment in our spiritual lives, we need to pray!

We need “Revival” in our lives. And this is not a new thing with us or a new thing for people of faith. It has been this way since the beginning of time. God wants more than anything to have a relationship with us, but we are often too busy, or too stubborn, or too something to do the things that help make that relationship possible. We need “Revival” in our lives, and “Revival” will begin with prayer – always has and always will.

In the Book of Acts, we have the story of the early days of the church. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers who were gathered in Jerusalem and they began to share the good news about Jesus with a large crowd. When it was all said and done, 3,000 people became believers that day and were baptized. Luke tells us that, prior to the day of Pentecost the Disciples spent their days in prayer. And, later, in the passage I read earlier, Luke tells us that those three thousand people who had become believers devoted themselves to “the apostle’s teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.” Prayer is the beginning of “Revival” – always has been, always will be!

But if you read the story of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, you will notice that the Holy Spirit didn’t fall on everyone there. The Spirit fell on those who were prepared to receive it – those who were “prayed up” and ready. When we pray, we open ourselves up to the power of God’s Spirit working within us. Prayer releases the power of God in our lives. When God’s people pray, God works in our lives. So, let me invite you to do something. Tonight, before you go to bed, draw an imaginary circle on the floor beside your bed. Then stand in that circle – kneel if you are comfortable doing that – then pray for the person in that circle to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. I know. It's
risky! It’s scary! There is no telling what God might do! If you want “Revival” in your spiritual life, pray!