

Asbury Revival: 'Become the Love of God by Experiencing the Love of God'

"Become the love of God by experiencing the love of God."

This was the challenge, given on the morning of Feb 8, that sparked the Asbury Revival of 2023. In little more than a week's time, tens of thousands of people from across the U.S. have traveled to the small Christian university in the tiny town of Wilmore, Kentucky, in search for revival.

It all started with one student taking the challenge to "become the love of God."

"Asbury, the world needs... 'a bunch of Christians' to experience the love of God so they can pour out the love of God, not because of their own efforts, not because of their own knowledge but because they are filled with His love," exhorted Rev. Zach Meerkreebs during the now infamous chapel service held in Hughes Auditorium at Asbury University, which is located 10 miles from Lexington, Kentucky.

No one could have imagined that a young man's authentic and transparent response to this challenge would change the social media narrative from frustration about cultural divisiveness to shared excitement about the Holy Spirit.

"Some of us need to sit in the love of God, some of us need to taste and see and experience the power of the Holy Spirit," the university's staff pastor explained.

"Because if you want to become love in action you start by prostrating yourself before the love of God."

The young man who stood up was the first of many other people who are standing up to confess that they have not been loving

others well. Fellow students who, like him, had remained in the auditorium to linger in prayer are among those who stood up, one after the other, to confess their own barriers to loving others in the way that it is described in the Bible.

Students and faculty were shocked at the students' transparency and the peace of God they felt when they returned to the auditorium after hearing that something very special was happening.

One by one, while the band continued to play worship music, the number of students who stood up to confess grew throughout the day and into the night. The worshipful exchange of receiving and expressing God's love in community still continues in the chapel nonstop.

Confessions of not walking in Christ's love included judging other students on campus, harboring anger at parents and other leaders, being in relationships that did not help shape them into Christlikeness, being caught up in pornography, seeking approval from others rather than serving them, hiding from accountability and resisting help from others.

Humility and honoring one another in the Spirit of Christ's love remains largely evident among students, staff and visitors even though tens of thousands of people of all ages, colors, socio-economic backgrounds and church denominations are crowding together on the small campus.

Most visitors have traveled long distances, some of them throughout the night. The line of as many as 1,000 people seems daunting at first. Visitors learn early on that when one person leaves the auditorium, another one is let in. The possibility of ever getting in seems improbable.

Things begin to shift, however, when nerves quiet down and people start to realize that God's tangible presence, His peace that passes all understanding, is right there where they stand. The hush in the line leaves the door open for people to

be further comforted by the many greeters who walk down the line and quietly thank people for coming. Information about facilities and what to expect are offered.

As guests start to settle in, they notice other expressions of love. Hot dogs and drinks at the food truck outside are free. Bottled water and a large variety of snacks that are set out on a large table inside are free. Bathrooms are open and clean.

They are further surprised by the large team of so many ushers at each door that seem to anticipate needs and provide answers before questions are even asked.

The quietness and humble hospitality allow guests to rest during the long journey to their seat, preparing then to rest in His rest once they join the worship service either outside on the front lawn, in the auditorium or in an overflow building.

In a post-masked world where fear of contagion has taught us to avoid one another, experiencing the love of God through people who are modeling Christ's love has been limited. Many of us have forgotten how to be loved. Many of us live with expectation of rejection if we dare to love.

To become His love poured out, we must first be poured into. To continue pouring out, we must continue being poured into. Asbury University is pouring out. They are opening their small space and their big hearts to the world. Yes, God's presence is ready and available wherever we are located. However, we must ask ourselves if we are in a posture of being poured into so that we can pour out His love to others.

What Meerkreebs said to seniors in college also applies to seniors in life: "Don't think you are going to do all of this stuff in your own strength. Don't leave here until you have learned about the love of God, experienced the love God. So, you can pour it out, pour it out, pour it out, and He will

fill you back up.”

Not everyone can or will make the trip to Asbury. Reports that people are lingering with another in Christ’s love are encouraging people to commune together in God’s presence and “Become His love.” {eoa}

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