

Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17, 23-32

Blow the horn in Zion;
 give a shout on my holy mountain!

Let all the people of the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming.

It is near—

a day of darkness and no light,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!

Like blackness spread out upon the mountains,
 a great and powerful army[a] comes,
 unlike any that has ever come before them,
 or will come after them in centuries ahead.

Yet even now, says the Lord,
 return to me with all your hearts,
 with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow;
tear your hearts
 and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
very patient, full of faithful love,
 and ready to forgive.

Who knows whether he will have a change of heart
 and leave a blessing behind him,
 a grain offering and a drink offering
 for the Lord your God?

Blow the horn in Zion;
 demand a fast;
 request a special assembly.

Gather the people;
 prepare a holy meeting;

assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.

Let the groom leave his room
and the bride her chamber.

Between the porch and the altar
let the priests, the Lord's ministers, weep.
Let them say, "Have mercy, Lord, on your people,
and don't make your inheritance a disgrace,
an example of failure among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

Children of Zion,
rejoice and be glad in the Lord your God,
because he will give you the early rain as a sign of
righteousness;
he will pour down abundant rain for you,
the early and the late rain, as before.[c]
The threshing floors will be full of grain;
the vats will overflow with new wine and fresh oil.
I will repay you for the years
that the cutting locust,
the swarming locust, the hopping locust, and the devouring
locust have eaten—
my great army, which I sent against you.
You will eat abundantly and be satisfied,
and you will praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has done wonders for you;
and my people will never again be put to shame.
You will know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the Lord your God—no other exists;
never again will my people be put to shame.

After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone;
your sons and your daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
and your young men will see visions.

In those days, I will also pour out my
spirit on the male and female slaves.

I will give signs in the heavens and on the earth—blood and fire
and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness, and
the moon to blood before the great and dreadful day of
the Lord comes. But everyone who calls on the Lord's name will
be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be
security, as the Lord has promised; and in Jerusalem,
the Lord will summon those who survive.

As I began reading up on Joel this week, I was initially wondering if this prophet would be relatable to us in 2020. Sometimes, these minor prophets feel like they're speaking to a specific situation that we aren't really part of, but then I opened up my first Biblical commentary and read the historian Max Halwell's take on Joel, and while I'm not going to quote it to you, because Halwell knows some great SAT vocal words, he basically said that historians have a hard time deciding when the prophet Joel was writing because his description of the events is so vague and ominous. The writer of Joel is basically like "we have a plague of locusts... and also there is a famine... and also things are really bad and our neighbors are God-less jerks." And historians look at that and compare it to records from that time period discover that the problem with using this for dating the text is that those troubles Joel was speaking to, come up kind of a lot! I kind of feel like this will be us in a few years, we'll make reference to "that difficult time in 2020..." and listeners will be like "which difficult time are you talking about? Which trouble are you referencing? Would it be the

global pandemic? The uprising against police brutality? The wild fires that burned down a sizable chunk of Australia? that weekend there was a hurricane in Iowa? The murder hornets? Or some other time I have blocked out to make it through the day?"

Suffice it to say that when Joel is talking to his reader saying "hey I know things are really hard and scary right now, and it feels like there is no hope..." I don't know about you all, but I feel like he is talking to me too.

So when the writer of Joel starts off chapter two by promising that the day of the Lord is coming, but that it might not be all muffins and marshmallows- I believe him. It seems right to me that this world might deserve God's wrath and judgement, I don't want it, and I bet you don't either, but I look around at how messed up everything is, and I think I would understand it. But then in verse 12, Joel starts to become the other kind of prophetic. Through most of chapter one and the early part of 2, he's been the kind of prophet who warns us that God is not pleased. Suddenly in verse 12, he offers his hearers and even us today some direction.

Come back to God with your whole heart

- I was really hoping that it would deputize me to tell other people what to do with their hearts

- there are definitely days where my worst self wants to fix the world by just calling people out- everyone that doesn't agree with me,

- but no, we are called to work on our own hearts- in the text it even tells the leaders how to lead- between the porch and the altar, weep and

- What would it mean to give God our whole heart

- a lot of us live divided heart lives. I mean, I know we are people of faith, God has at least a piece of all of our lives, I know that cuz you could be golfing or boating or watching netflix, and instead you're tuned in here, and I'm not usually great television. I know that you care. But I do wonder if trust God with our whole hearts... or is it like God v. The stock market, v the government / political party, v my own ability to handle things

- Does God really have our whole hearts? And if not, what's the other half trusting? and what would it take to give that section over to God too.

- You can't fake it

- God wants authenticity from us

- I had a problem with my gym membership for a while.

- had it for 9 months, owned the clothes, started getting these special work out drinks, even sometimes went and stood in the gym- but didn't lose a pound or gain a muscle. Turns out, real change has to come from the inside.

- some of us treat church like I was treating the gym. If we wear the right clothes, show up at the right places, make

all the right secret hand motions, maybe just maybe we will pass as someone who lives a life centered on God.

- This is not a new church problem- Joel has to say to his readers “Rend your hearts, not your clothes”

- Not for fear of punishment, but for love of God’s goodness.
 - Joel is saying that God WANTS to forgive, that his God, and your God, the same Lord of “The Day of the Lord” is more mercy than judgement, more blessing than wrath, more deserving of praise than we can imagine and that should call us back to God
 - We should give God our whole hearts, not for fear of what will happen if we don’t, but out of acknowledgement of who we could become and how we could live if we do

- Things we do out of fear, v things we do out of love.
 - Birthday party story

Here is the truth that I can’t help but keep hearing from Joel 2, God is love, and when we respond to God’s love by being people totally in, people sold out and trying as best they can to give their whole selves into reflecting that love back to God and others. Who not only change their outside, but change their insides to match- we not only are not crushed by the junk of this world, we are transformed into beacons of hope, we thrive, we live bigger bolder brighter lives.

How will we know? How will we know when we have given ourselves completely over to God?

- Things will get better.... there will be more than enough to meet everyone's needs- we will rejoice in how God has blessed us.

- (Foreshadow's) Pentecost

- imagine a new way of being, we will be able to see a world beyond this present struggle

- that love and hope would become contagious- remember that when Joel promises redemption it isn't individual, it's communal- we are redeemed together, all of us. It is for the **WHOLE**

- this is wild because Joel makes sure to go out of his way to draw the circle big- as a result, our circles must be big and diverse too.

- if there are still groups of people excluded from the kingdom of God, then it isn't the wholeness of redemption and that... should change how we live in the world, how we love our neighbors, how we interact with people who see things differently than we do.

So in this time of sorrow and struggle, of frustration and futility, of feeling like the whole world is off its rails and you are going over the cliff with it- remember that Joel has already told us how to fix this world- and that is to change our whole hearts, authentically, and as a reflection of God's love, not a desire to escape God's wrath. For no matter how dark or dangerous the coming days and weeks may seem or may be, we can be assured that we have a God who loves us, who is always for us, and who is bringing this world back to him all together. There is hope, there is always hope for the day of the Lord.

Let us pray...

Merciful God, who responds to our longing with presence and our lament with comfort and hope, who welcomes our repentance and desires the wholeness of our hearts, help us to see what we hold back from you, give us the courage to surrender ourselves and to allow our hearts to be changed. When we are discouraged, draw your holy spirit near to us. When we are frustrated by the brokenness of this world, remind us that you are the great healer, and that you are already drawing this world back to you. Help us respond to that redemption by living bold lives reveling in your love instead of eking out fearful existences aimed only avoiding wrath, so that we will embody your diverse and joyful kingdom. Amen.