

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
Service of Daily Prayer -- Morning  
May 16, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

P: O Lord, open my lips,

C: **and my mouth will declare Your praise.**

*Psalm 51:15*

P: Make haste, O God, to deliver me;

C: **Make haste to help me, O Lord.**

*Psalm 70:1*

P: Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;

C: **for His steadfast love endures forever!**

*Psalm 118:29*

**All: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

### Scripture Readings

*Joel 2:21-27*

“Fear not, O land;

be glad and rejoice,

for the Lord has done great things!

Fear not, you beasts of the field,

for the pastures of the wilderness are green;

the tree bears its fruit;

the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

“The threshing floors shall be full of grain;  
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

I will restore to you the years

that the swarming locust has eaten,

the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,

my great army, which I sent among you.

“Be glad, O children of Zion,

and rejoice in the Lord your God,

for he has given the early rain for your  
vindication;

he has poured down for you abundant rain,

the early and the latter rain, as before.

“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,

and praise the name of the Lord your God,  
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to  
shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,  
and that I am the Lord your God and there is  
none else.

And my people shall never again be put to  
shame.

*1 John 5:9-15*

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

John 17:11-19

[Jesus said:] Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

**Hymn:** *LSB 539, Christ is the World's Redeemer*

1 Christ is the world's Re - deem - er, The lov - er of the pure,  
2 Christ has our host sur - round - ed With clouds of mar - tyrs bright,  
3 Down through the realm of dark - ness He strode in vic - to - ry,  
△ 4 Glo - ry to God the Fa - ther, The un - be - got - ten One,

The font of heav'n-ly wis - dom, Our trust and hope se - cure,  
Who wave their palms in tri - umph And fire us for the fight.  
And at the hour ap - point - ed He rose tri - um - phant-ly.  
All hon - or be to Je - sus, His sole - be - got - ten Son,

The ar - mor of His sol - diers, The Lord of earth and sky,  
Then Christ the cross as - cend - ed To save a world un - done  
And now, to heav'n as - cend - ed, He sits up - on the throne  
And to the Ho - ly Spir - it— The per - fect Trin - i - ty.

Our health while we are liv - ing, Our life when we shall die.  
And, suf - f'ring for the sin - ful, Our full re - demp - tion won.  
Whence He had ne'er de - part - ed, His Fa - ther's and His own.  
Let all the worlds give an - swer: A - men! So let it be.

**Sermon**

Today's Old Testament reading takes us to the book of Joel, one of the shorter "minor prophet" books at the end of the Old Testament. If you're wondering what you know about Joel, or struggling to remember anything from some long-ago Bible class, I can sum up pretty quickly for you what we know about him: his name was Joel, son of Pethuel. And that's it! We can guess at a little bit: he probably lived in or near Jerusalem, and he probably lived between roughly 850 to 750 BC. And now you know as much about the prophet Joel as anybody does.

This book that bears his name is short, only three chapters long, but there are two important passages that you do already know. He gives us the text for Ash Wednesday, "Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart... rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." He also gives us the text that Peter quotes on Pentecost as he preaches to the crowd there: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, your sons and daughters will prophesy... And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." As we traditionally consider Pentecost

the birthday of the Christian Church, Joel gets the honor of providing the sermon text for the very first Christian sermon, by Peter himself! In fact, today's reading is sandwiched between those two; it picks up where Ash Wednesday leaves off, and it leads directly into Pentecost.

The major event that this book deals with is an environmental disaster: the land of Israel was suffering from a plague of locusts, huge swarms of those insects that would devour every living plant and crop in the country. Because of the locusts, they were faced with famine. Locusts aren't just an ancient thing, by the way, and the stories we read in Scripture about them causing famines are no exaggeration; plagues of locusts can still happen. In 2004, there was a swarm reported that was 150 miles long and estimated to contain 69 billion insects. A swarm like that can devastate an entire nation, and at Joel's time, it did. The bugs had simply consumed anything edible in the land. Joel preached and told the people that this natural disaster was a warning of God's wrath, that was a foretaste of the final judgment that awaits all who do not repent and return to the Lord, all who do not have faith in Him. But he also reassures the people that there is still hope. There is always hope in God. It's never too late. He is always ready and eager to forgive those who ask for forgiveness, to turn from wrath to grace.

The way that God sometimes works in the world is through these warnings to get people's attention and make them see a better way, the Godly way. It's a bit like having surgery -- I know many of you have had some pretty major operations, going under the surgeon's knife. And you also know very well that it's not a pain-free experience. At least you're unconscious or otherwise anaesthetized during the procedure itself, but anyone who's had surgery can say that the recovery period is not free from pain. One member once commented that it was more like "physical terrorist" than "physical therapist" for the suffering involved.

But we submit ourselves to this pain with the understanding that, whatever the surgery is, the goal is that it will ultimately lead to a better quality of life. Sure, for the next few weeks your knee might feel worse than it did before, but in the long run the hope and intention is for improvement. It's not a bad way to think about some of these hardships the Bible describes -- for the people in Joel's time, they desperately needed a wake-up call, and in his preaching he used this natural disaster, this plague of locusts, to remind them of who the true God is. Pain and hardship, as a result of sin's corruption of God's good creation, is a reminder that we always need repentance and faith. It's not pleasant, it's not fun, but whatever ends up strengthening our faith, causing us to repent, pulling us back to God, is ultimately good for us.

As I mentioned, this is where that Ash Wednesday reading comes from. But today's passage gives us the words immediately after that call to repent! When the people repent, God most certainly relents and restores. "Do not be afraid!" he says, "Be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!" When the people return to the Lord in faith, He shows them every ounce of mercy and kindness and compassion that we could imagine. When we too come to the Lord in faith, He shows us every ounce of mercy and kindness and compassion we could imagine or need or desire. As the Bible says elsewhere, our Lord is merciful and full of grace, slow to anger and abounding in love and kindness.

Joel paints a picture of God's benevolence and restoration by describing all that Israel had lacked. The locusts caused famine, no crops, nothing for livestock to eat; he looks ahead to green pastures, fruit trees and grape vines giving "their full yield." He sees threshing floors full of grain, huge vats overflowing with wine and oil. He says, "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you." When God restores what is lost, Joel says, it's a sign of His blessing and His forgiveness.

That is precisely how God operates. When He restores to us what we lost because of our sin, it is one of the ways He demonstrates His mercy. We lost life by our sin; the wages of sin is death, what we have earned because of humanity's rebellion. We lost righteousness, no longer being right with

God. We lost the way this Creation was meant to be, exiled from Eden. We only have to look around at the world to see how profoundly broken it is.

Just as Joel indicates, when we or any people repent and return, when we or anyone comes to God in faith, when we or anyone receive what Jesus gives -- then we see and know the same thing. God restores what is lost. He restores life to us through Christ's resurrection. He restores righteousness to us through Jesus' own perfect obedience. He is restoring all of Creation through him as well.

As I mentioned, this passage is what connects together the Ash Wednesday call to repent with the Pentecost text that speaks of the Holy Spirit poured out on all of us. Men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile -- "on all flesh," it says. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," Joel proclaimed. This picture of salvation is not limited to earthly blessings like good crops, and it is not limited to the people of one land, one tribe, one period in time. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved, and this Lord in whom we find this salvation is Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, the King of the universe. And what connects these two? The good gifts of God.

At other times, the prophets make this comparison more explicit, that these good fruits of the earth are just a foretaste or a symbol of God's spiritual gifts. Some broad themes can be seen across the Old Testament: oil represents healing; wine represents joy; grain represents plenty and abundance. The fig tree in particular represents peace and well-being, the long-term abiding blessing of God.

The tree will bear fruit and give a full yield, Joel says -- Jesus was crucified on a tree, and that cross, that tree of death and pain hardship, is transformed by Jesus into the life-giving tree. In Eden, Adam and Eve ate from the tree of life; their sin took that away from them. On Calvary, Jesus died on another tree to counteract that first one; his cross has become the new tree of life, the true tree of life and out of all the tree of the world that bare, blood-stained one most shows us and gives us the peace and abiding blessings of God.

"So fear not; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Be glad, o children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God!" This Sunday brings us nearly to the end of the Easter season, and this passage reminds us of that Easter joy and promise. Next week is indeed the day of Pentecost, as this points us to. The Lord has done great things, things which should give us reason to rejoice and be glad beyond anything else in the entire history of the world -- the resurrection of the Son of God, death and sin and evil being stomped down and defeated, the cause for all fear taken away because we are His people and, as His beloved children, we will never be disappointed.

The Easter season, all fifty days long until Pentecost, is almost over -- but that does not and will never change the central importance of that event for all of us. It only refocuses what it means for us and how we now should live. Because all that Joel spoke so many centuries ago is still true, right now and right here, for all the people of Jesus: in every circumstances, at all times and in all places, we rejoice gladly, we know that the Lord is with us, and that because of the great things he has done, we are reconciled and we receive all that Joel points us to: the abiding peace and blessing of God.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father who art in heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name,  
Thy kingdom come,  
Thy will be done on earth  
as it is in heaven;  
give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses**

as we forgive those  
who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the kingdom  
and the power and the glory  
forever and ever. Amen.

**C:** Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

**P:** O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C:** Amen.

**All:** I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

**P:** Let us bless the Lord!

**C:** Thanks be to God!

**P:** The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

**C:** Amen.