

March 8, 2021

Text: Joel 2:1-2 *[God speaks to us through His prophet Joel, son of Pethuel. Very little is known about the prophet Joel, whose name means Yahweh, or the LORD (I am who is) is God!]*

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand— a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come.

Devotion: Phil Stiefel

What a beginning to start God's prophecy! Judah had just experienced a massive locust plague and severe drought that devastated the nation. I cannot fathom such devastation, as I have never experienced anything like it – not even close. The loss of life from illness and starvation of both people and animals must have been horrific. Covid doesn't even come close! There was TOTAL destruction of ALL vegetation that people and animals need to live on. We saw God do this once before as well, to Pharaoh and all of Egypt 6-7 centuries earlier in the plagues used to convince Pharaoh to let God's people Israel go free to leave to worship God.

In Joel's day God used this plague to call His people to repentance, to leave their sinful lives, their idolatry, apathy, violence, adultery and return to their loving creator, their true Father and God, the source of life eternal! Repentance would lead to restoration and blessing from God. It is also a sign of the "coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD," (chapter 2, verse 31), the promised **Judgment Day for all mankind**. It is coming soon for all people! You cannot escape it. There is only one place to flee for safety and life – the cross of Christ Jesus. Ch 2, v 32 "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD **will be saved;**"

Our Ash Wednesday service to begin this season of Lent also had the words from Joel chapter 2. A call from our loving Father to repent, to change our minds and hearts about our sinful ways, to seek God's forgiveness in Jesus death and resurrection, and to ask the Holy Spirit to return our hearts to God, to change us so that we will do His will, to love God and each other. To live in God's love and joy no matter what our earthly circumstances are or will become.

Opening Sentences

- P** "Yet even now," declares the LORD,
- C** "return to Me with all your heart,

- P** with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
- C** and rend your hearts and not your garments."

- P** Return to the LORD, your God, for He is gracious and merciful,
- C** slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;

- P** and He relents over disaster.

Let us prepare our hearts for God to change them. Lent is a great time to read all the book of Joel!

You already know the ending – a Savior whose heart is full of joy rising to life on Easter morning, joyful because He paid the punishment for your sins and mine, and that means eternal life with God in heaven, and life beyond anything we can even imagine! Guaranteed through Jesus Christ! May God strengthen your faith and love for Him, and through that your love for all people God places in your lives, that Jesus' Easter joy may be your joy! Share your joy with everyone, so they too will believe in Jesus and experience true grace, joy and life eternal. God bless your day! He is so worthy of our praise and worship!