



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for June 27, 2021
“Majoring in the Minors: Power”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Joel 2:13, 28-32

Joel 2:13, 28-32

*¹³ Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity.
²⁸ “And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.
³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
³¹ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.
³² And everyone who calls
on the name of the LORD will be saved;
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be deliverance,
as the LORD has said,
even among the survivors
whom the LORD calls.*

The Cicada

They have come and gone, sort of. The 17-year locusts have made themselves known in a big way the past month or so. They sure have been loud.

The 17-year locusts are really cicadas and not locusts. Locusts are more like flying grasshoppers and are apt to eat anything and everything in their path. Cicadas present themselves every seventeen years like clockwork. They emerge from the ground, shed their skin, and begin to mate, all with a loud roar. I did an outdoor wedding some seventeen years ago at a time when the cicadas were out in full bloom. They were so loud I felt like I was talking with a bucket over my head. I will never forget it.

The Locust

Locusts, as mentioned a second ago, are much more destructive. They pretty much eat everything in sight.

Worldwide swarms of locusts are not uncommon today and they are tremendously destructive. They can wipe out entire crops in just a few days, leaving those affected without food.

The Prophet of the Flying Bugs

An invasion of locusts provides the context for the prophesy we study today from the Book of Joel.

Joel was one of the earlier prophets. He more than likely prophesied sometime during the 9th century B.C. We know very little about him, save for the name of his father. We do know that Joel prophesied during a plague of locusts. In fact, some have called Joel, *The Prophet of the Flying Bugs*. I guess all of us need to be known by something.

The impact of the locusts was severe. They wiped out all the crops, and because the crops were wiped out no one had food, animals and people included. The need was tremendous. People were starving. It was a terrible calamity.

Enter the Prophet Joel. He likened the locusts to that of an invading army. To Joel, the locusts were like a military invasion. The number of cicadas just recently has been reported to have been in the billions. The number of locusts during Joel's time was probably no different.

The Day of the Lord

Joel saw the calamity caused by the locusts as a harbinger of what was to come. Joel talked about a day yet to come when the Lord would judge his people. He called it the day of the Lord.

The phrase, the day of the Lord, was first mentioned by Joel and then repeated by the prophets who followed him. Jesus himself refers to the day of the Lord in Matthew 24. Peter does in Acts 2. John does throughout the Book of Revelation.

The day of the Lord is that day when the Lord offers sure and swift judgement upon those who choose not to follow him.

Given Pause to Consider

Calamities give us pause. They cause us to think. We wonder if God might be trying to tell us something. We ask ourselves, what are we learning? Or after the fact, what *have* we learned?

Who of us, even for a second, thought about such things during the pandemic? Might God be judging us?

When disaster strikes, we wonder what God might be trying to say. When the unexpected comes and disrupts the very things that provide safety and security, we find ourselves at a crossroads. We can either freak out and figure all is lost, or we can be drawn to a more faithful relationship with God. The warning Joel offered against the backdrop of those voracious locusts was a call to return to the Lord. One thing about a disaster, at least the Lord has our attention.

The Call to Repentance

In this short book of three chapters, Joel turns from the destruction caused by the locusts to the blessings offered to those who seek to turn God's way.

Joel goes from warning to hope and does so on the highway paved with mercy and grace. In Joel chapter 2, Joel launches into a discussion about repentance.

He states quite clearly, *"Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity."* (Joel 2:13)

God Allows U-Turns

We have talked about repentance on many occasions. It is vital to a vibrant spiritual life. Effectively, repentance is a spiritual about face. Repentance is a U-turn, if you will, when it comes changing the direction of our lives. Where once we were headed one direction away from God, we make a U-turn and head toward God.

God is all about U-turns.

Repentance Is a Posture

I have heard it said that repentance is a posture. I like that.

Repentance is clearly a disposition of the heart where we come before God contrite and humbled over the things we have done. We want to do things differently and ask God to help us with that.

We can all be thankful that God stands ready to help through his Son Jesus Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit.

Repentance Is a Progression

Repentance is a progression, involving recognition, contrition, prayer, and, finally, jubilation upon being forgiven. I think we miss the contrition part way too much. There is not much sorrow over our sins these days.

There was a time in Methodism where the Mourner's Bench was a regular part of worship. People would come there to mourn their sins.

I have always been taken by the Prayer of Humble Access that is a part of our communion liturgy. I had a fellow a long time ago say to me that *"we don't pray that enough."*

"We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to partake of this Sacrament that we might walk in newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may ever more dwell in him and he in us."

Maybe some challenge or struggle has gotten your attention and brought you to the place of repentance?

The Spirit Poured Out

The good news for today is that Jesus opens the door to forgiveness and a whole new way of life. On top of that the Holy Spirit empowers us to stay close to God and live life faithfully to him.

Joel puts it this way, *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”* (Joel 2:28-29)

Joel knew that God’s Spirit brought new life. Peter recognized that when he preached at Pentecost. As we know, the Spirit moved at Pentecost in a powerful way, and Peter knew that the power of Holy Spirit was nothing less than the fulfillment of what Joel prophesied centuries before. God was moving in powerful ways to change the lives of those who had gathered. Power was given so they:

- Could honor God in new ways.
- Could look ahead without fear.
- Could strike out to share the good news about Jesus.
- Could live as God wanted them to live.

God’s Spirit continues to move in the very same ways.

What the Lord Might Be Doing

The Cicadas we spoke about a few minutes ago are so predictable. The other calamities of life are not so that way. They are hard to predict.

None of us wish tough things upon our lives, nor do we go looking for them. When they come though:

- Let’s consider what the Lord might be doing through them.
- Let’s consider what he might be trying to say.
- Let’s consider how the Lord might be leading.
- Let’s consider how he might actually be calling us to repent.

And in all these things, let’s rend our hearts and lay ourselves before God and, by so doing, may we experience the power of God’s Spirit to redeem us and make us whole. And in that may we rejoice in the blessings of God as we are drawn closer to him.

“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Joel 2:32

Just As I Am

Just As I Am is a favorite song of the church. It was sung at every Billy Graham Crusade. It has been sung at countless revivals. It is sung by the faithful as a reminder that we are to present ourselves before God in humble contrition.

Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou didst me come to thee, O lamb of God I come, I come.”

May God bless us all.