



Daily Meditations

November 9-14, 2020

The Biblical readings are taken from the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer for Year 2 and written by the St. Stephen's Meditation Writing Team: Dave Boyd, Becky Denton, Pat Gillory, Traci Maxwell, Jay Nickel, Bob Reed, T.Cay Rowe, and Carroll Wilson.

Click on the scripture reading for each day to go directly to link.

COLLECT, PROPER 27

O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prologue

I have chosen the Hebrew Scripture's book of Joel for this week's meditation, primarily because I have never looked closely at Joel before.

When I encounter difficult texts, I remind myself of my theories of interpretation. First, I ask when Joel lived, to whom he wrote, and to what historical circumstances did he respond. My research tells me we know very little about these things.

So, I approach these Scriptures through a Christian interpretive lens: where Jesus' life, teaching, and example reveal the nature of God by making present and visible the Kingdom of God, here, now; where Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection expose the impotence of sacred and civic violence. I also approach Holy Scripture with an assumption that they speak to us about our time and circumstances, just as they spoke to their original audience.

Writing to Give Hope

Monday, November 9, 2020

Joel 1:1-13

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever

happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? - NIV, Joel 1:2

Joel opens describing the horrific, apparently recent, devastation from a plague of locusts. Fields, vineyard, trees, crops have all been destroyed. Nothing exists for offering in worship, the Priests have nothing to do, the people nothing to eat or drink. As Joel says, "Surely the people's joy is withered away" (v.12)

Let's try and relate through our own experience of the current COVID-19 pandemic. It comes suddenly and unexpectedly; it turns our day-to-day lives and our ability to earn a livelihood upside down; it kills people we know and love; it takes away our opportunities for collective worship; it presents no obvious hope for the future.

What would you write to your family, friends, and neighbors to offer hope and encouragement? Where would you look for meaning in these distressing events? Joel takes up this challenge for his people.

Lord, may we continue to seek hope in the face of our challenges. Amen.

Someone to Call

Tuesday, November 10, 2020

To you, Lord, I call. - NIV, Joel 1:19

Joel 1:15-2:11

What do we do in our quietest moments of despair? To whom do we talk in the solitude of our minds? What do we do with our COVID-19 loneliness, our fears for our own health, and for the health of those we know and love, for the health of the nation and the world?

Even in the midst of feeling abandoned by God and doubt about the efficacy of prayer, I like Joel, call to the Lord.

Lord be with us.

Reason to Hope

Wednesday, November 11, 2020

Joel 2:12-19

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. - NIV, Joel 2:13

The prophet Joel suggests that if the people return to the Lord whole heartedly, then maybe God will remove this calamity and maybe even send blessings.

When something goes wrong, we want to find the reason, the cause, the blame. If we can find that, we have some sense of control and see the universe as less random and scary.

Joel doesn't identify the particular sins for which he calls for repentance. I don't believe God sends punishments for sins, but turning away from our sins makes the world a better place. I don't believe God sent COVID-19 as a punishment for sin. I don't believe God sends the devastating forest fires

around the world as punishment for sin.

But maybe some of our problems result as a consequence of sin; maybe our population has grown too large; maybe we crowd the natural areas of the world where infection from other animals spreads to humans; maybe the crowding leads to natural fires and destroy the places we live; maybe we act too carelessly about our hygiene and spread germs and viruses to others; maybe we value commerce more than human lives.

Maybe, if we make changes, these calamities get removed eventually. Joel, like most of the Hebrew Scripture writers reminds us that we have reason to hope. We base that hope upon God's nature, revealed throughout the scriptures of: compassion, slowness of anger, and abundance of love.

So, in hope, let us turn from our sins towards a better world. Amen

Obligatory Happy Endings

Thursday, November 12, 2020

Joel 2:21-27

Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. - NIV, Joel 2:27

Charles Dickens wrote a second ending to the novel *Great Expectations* because his friends convinced him that it needed a happy ending. Today's reading seems like a similar, obligatory, happy ending promising: everything that was lost will be restored; everyone will live in peace and plenty; nothing like this will ever happen again. Joel must have felt called to offer hope and encouragement to his listeners/readers. But we know from history that Judea was ultimately destroyed, that the Second Temple was destroyed by the Roman empire. The horrors of pogroms throughout history and the Nazi holocaust "shamed" Jews.

What do I do with a prophecy that seems blatantly wrong? I work from an assumption that all Holy Scripture has something to say to us today in our present circumstances. Do I look for a pastoral example in Joel's false promises because, for a time, his people needed hope? Should I avoid these questions for fear of shaking people's faith? Do the promises refer to some metaphorical rather than physical/historical reality? Do the promises refer to some yet-to-be-realized future beyond our present, some 2500 years after Joel wrote them?

I don't know. I hang onto the faith (hope in action) that God is with us. Amen

To Share a Dream

Friday, November 13, 2020

Joel 2:28-3:8

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. - NIV, Joel 2:28

The Hebrew Scriptures, the Tanakh, number these verses as a separate Chapter 3 [Our chapter 3 becomes chapter 4] giving these verses the place of importance they seem to deserve. In Acts 2:14-2, Peter quotes these verses to explain the Pentecost event of the the pouring out of the Spirit he and the

other disciples had just experienced.

While the entire irenic vision Joel lays out has not yet fully come to pass, perhaps we, like Peter have had experiences, dreams, and visions of a brighter future that our children will articulate and help realize in the future.

I have a dream of a nonviolent world. When that dream gives me hope, I believe it is a gift of the Spirit. Sharing that dream with others including my children may guide others towards ultimately realizing that dream.

May it be so. Amen

Revenge Fantasies

Saturday, November 14, 2020

Joel 3:9-17

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. - NIV, Joel 3:9

Joel culminates his prophesy with this chapter of blood-thirsty, xenophobic, calls for war and revenge on his country's neighbors.

When I engage the interpretive lens of looking at these scriptures through the life, teaching, and example of Jesus, I find no examples of revenge and violence on the part of Jesus. Instead, I find calls to love your enemy (Matthew 5:44), I find compassion and respect for officers of the occupying Roman army (John 4:46-54). And ultimately, his resurrection reveals the impotence of violence and revenge brought on by his enemies in the Temple hierarchy and the Roman governor.

I have had revenge fantasies against my enemies and people I believe do evil intentionally. I too feel tempted to resort to coercion to make things go my way.

So, I conclude Joel, like all of us, suffers from an idolatrous worship of the "myth of redemptive violence."

Lord, forgive me, forgive us, and forgive Joel. Amen

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