

**Return to the Lord your God!** The drumbeat of Lent: **Return!** Hear God calling out to you: hear Joel's prophecy, God's invitation. Joel's prophecy is dark, terrifying, the imagery is vivid. It sets the stage for God's invitation and promise: **You have turned away from Me in your hearts and minds; I have now shown you where that path will take you. But it is not too late. Turn back! Return to the Lord! I am gracious and merciful, I will bless you.** God's call to return is a call to join Jesus, but not just a self-serving Jesus friend, but Jesus on a path of pain and suffering; the only path that does not lead to destruction; it leads to blessings from God and the gift of eternal life in Christ.

You see it all over the Old Testament, tonight with the prophet Joel; orients us to the season, highlights the problem, lays out the solution in all its beauty and simplicity. God calls us to simply return to Him, He will address our needs, provide for all things that lead to our salvation.

We don't know a lot about Joel. The book that bears his name - only 73 verses. But it's rich, deep, complex. His jumping-off point is a plague. Yike! God uses plague to get you to look at your life and look at what is truly important. A plague then would strike Israel and foreshadow the coming **Day of the Lord**. Joel's message is straightforward: a day of judgment will come. He pleads with the people to turn to God, pleads for you to turn to the Lord. Be found righteous on that **great and awesome day**. The most sure thing in life is it will come and you will be judged. What can be done?

You almost hear Joel's audience asking him: **Who then can be saved?** Then Joel brings good news; he brings a promise: **It shall come to pass, everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.**

Only to return to the Lord their God, **for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and**

**He relents over disaster.** Stop trusting in yourselves and trust in God. That means, stop justifying your sins, stop thinking you aren't that bad, stop thinking that your good counts for something. It means stop! Stop.

Return to the Lord means, sorrow over sin, it means you stop desiring sin, it means you're ashamed how you've lived as if God did not matter and as if you mattered most. Your Lord's Name you have not hallowed.

Joel's words can and should hit you the same way they hit the Israelites. No way to escape it. When you decided that you knew better than God about . . . well . . . everything. That's the swarm of locusts, and destruction of all of the vegetation is the least of your worries. Eternal death and damnation should absolutely terrify you. Repent! Repent. Return to the Lord your God, **rend your hearts and not your garments.** Be shaken at the core of your being! No just sorry to get out of trouble by sincere sorrow, I beg you repent dear child so you may live and not be damned.

Joel brings good news *for you* too! He brings a promise. **It shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.**

This eason, I pray you dwell deeper, deeper into God's call. **Return to the Lord** echoes in your ears as it did theirs.

**You will be satisfied,** Joel declares. Such understatement! In the end, our "satisfaction" all given through the atoning life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil.** That's points to this Holy Supper. Oil as an anointing in baptism, olive oil mixed with ash upon you, anointing your forehead, grain and wine brought to you to join you to His very flesh and blood. Your only life is here, joined to Him. Be forgiven. Be satisfied. Return to the Lord these 40 days. You are marked with death, that you may be marked with His life. Return O Child of God and fear nothing.