

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Joel 2:23-32**

<sup>2:23</sup> O children of Zion, be glad 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 later rain, as before. <sup>24</sup> The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. <sup>25</sup> I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame. <sup>28</sup> Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. <sup>30</sup> I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. <sup>32</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

**Commentary**

The first verse tells us that this book is by Joel "son of Penuel". We do not know who this Joel is, for he is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament; however, the text does tell us something about him. First, he was a prophet. Second, he has an appreciation of worship in the Temple. He mentions various officials, but never a king, so he probably lived after the return from exile. The earliest he could have written is then 515 BC, when the Temple was rebuilt.

Following the destructive descent of a huge horde of locusts, which the prophet compares in Chs. 1-2 to an invading army, the land is laid waste. Food supplies are cut off, granaries are depleted, and worship at the Temple ceases, without grain or animals for sacrifice. Will God forgive the peoples' sins and lift the insect plague? God does forgive; he has "pity on his people" (2:18). He returns fertility to the land, restores Judah to place of honor among nations, and destroys the locusts. "Early rain" (2:23) softened earth parched by the summer heat; it made ploughing possible; "later rain", in April/May, provided sustenance for summer crops. Trees again bear fruit (2:24). God will "repay" (2:25) for the destruction by the locusts ("hopper ... cutter" – stages in insect development) sent by him. He is still Judah's God, "in the midst of

Israel" (2:27), the only God. Judgment Day, "the day of the LORD", will come "afterward" (2:28), much later. He will grant his power, his "spirit", to all Judeans, to "sons ..." and even to "slaves" (2:29). Signs ("portents", 2:30) will warn of the coming of the Day. Then the remnant faithful to God "shall be saved" (2:32), including those "whom the LORD calls".

### **Reflection**

After the fortunes of the people of Judah are reversed, God's Spirit acts in an all-encompassing way to tear down barriers of age, gender, and status. Joel's words reminds us of the action of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, when people of many languages suddenly understood Peter's sermon. Have you experienced God's physical and spiritual restoration in your own life?

### **2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**

<sup>4:6</sup> As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. <sup>16</sup> At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **Commentary**

In the conclusion of the letter, the author depicts Paul as seeing his death as imminent. He says that his coming martyrdom is a "libation", literally an offering poured around the base of the altar as an offering for sin; Paul's death will pay homage to God and will contribute to the saving of others. Like a prize boxer and a runner, he has completed the event, i.e. his ministry; he has preserved and guarded "the faith" (v. 7) handed down to him. Jews wore *crowns* or wreaths in joy and honor; in Greece, winners of athletic meets wore them. Paul will receive his – as will other Christians – when Christ comes again ("his appearing", v. 8). As Jesus was deserted as death approached, so is Paul almost alone: "only Luke is with me" (v. 11). At his first trial or hearing ("defense", v. 16), "all deserted" him – all but Christ, who helped him proclaim the good news to all, both present and beyond. Then Paul was rescued "from the lion's mouth" (v. 17), from violent death. Christ will rescue him from the devil's onslaughts (but likely not from physical death). After final personal messages (vv. 19-21), the author prays that Christ may be with Timothy; may God's "grace" (v. 22), his freely-given gift of love, be with the members of Timothy's community.

### **Reflection**

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." These words are quite familiar to us from obituaries and funerals. Do they reflect the way in which you'd want to finish your Christian journey: as a victor in life's struggles?

### **Luke 18:9-14**

<sup>18:9</sup> He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' <sup>14</sup> I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

### **Commentary**

Luke has presented Jesus telling a parable about a judge and a widow. Even the uncaring judge listens to a petition, eventually; when Christ comes again, he will hear and answer the prayers of the faithful with due alacrity. Now Jesus tells a parable to "some" who take a legalistic approach to Judaism: "they were righteous", pious. Pharisees kept the Law scrupulously - both written and aural, so they must be acceptable to God! (*The unwritten law formed a protective shell round Mosaic law, reducing the chances of ever erring to the point of transgressing the real law.*) Like the Pharisee in the story, they were fastidious in their observation of ritual practices: they fasted on Mondays and Thursdays, and tithed (v. 12): they were seen to be religious. But their pride in keeping the Law led them into self-righteousness ("trusted in themselves", v. 9), self-importance, and arrogance ("regarded others with contempt"). On the other hand, tax collectors were despised for collaborating with the Roman occupiers. At this point, Jesus' hearers would be cheering for the Pharisee, especially since most were followers of the Pharisaic party. The tax collector admits he is a sinner (v. 13), repents ("beating his breast") and seeks God's mercy. In v. 14, Jesus explains the example story: the tax collector goes home "justified", accepted by God, acquitted in God's court of justice, for he has recognized his need for God's mercy – but not the Pharisee. In the kingdom, roles will be reversed: God receives those who turn to him and implore his mercy; he rejects those who parade their supposed virtues. We should receive the Kingdom as a child does (v. 17)

### **Reflection**

The word "humble" has the same root as the word "humus" – dirt, like the kind you buy in bags at the plant nursery. Those who are humble lower themselves, presumably to the level of the dirt. Here the hated government agent is humble, while the professional religious person is arrogant. Are our eyes open to see the way that God so often reverses our expectations?

### **Responsive Psalter**

from **Psalms 65**

<sup>65:1</sup> Praise is due to you,  
O God, in Zion;  
**and to you shall vows be performed,**  
<sup>2</sup> O you who answer prayer!  
To you all flesh shall come.

- <sup>3</sup> **When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,  
you forgive our transgressions.**
- <sup>4</sup> Happy are those whom you choose and bring near  
to live in your courts.  
**We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,  
your holy temple.**
- <sup>5</sup> By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,  
O God of our salvation;  
**you are the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas.**
- <sup>6</sup> **By your strength you established the mountains;  
you are girded with might.**
- <sup>7</sup> You silence the roaring of the seas,  
the roaring of their waves,  
the tumult of the peoples.
- <sup>8</sup> Those who live at earth's farthest bounds  
are awed by your signs;  
**you make the gateways of the morning  
and the evening shout for joy.**
- <sup>9</sup> You visit the earth and water it,  
you greatly enrich it;  
**the river of God is full of water;  
you provide the people with grain,  
for so you have prepared it.**
- <sup>10</sup> You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.
- <sup>11</sup> **You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.**
- <sup>12</sup> The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,
- <sup>13</sup> **the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.**

### **Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**