

Dare to Dream
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United Church of Broomfield
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Joel 2:21-32 – The Message

Fear not, Earth! Be glad and celebrate!
God has done great things.
Fear not, wild animals!
The fields and meadows are greening up.
The trees are bearing fruit again:
a bumper crop of fig trees and vines!
Children of Zion, celebrate!
Be glad in your God.
He's giving you a teacher
to train you how to live right—
Teaching, like rain out of heaven, showers
of words
to refresh and nourish your soul, just as
he used to do.
And plenty of food for your body—silos full
of grain,
casks of wine and barrels of olive oil.
"I'll make up for the years of the locust,
the great locust devastation—
Locusts savage, locusts deadly,
fierce locusts, locusts of doom,
That great locust invasion
I sent your way.
You'll eat your fill of good food.
You'll be full of praises to your God,
The God who has set you back on your
heels in wonder.
Never again will my people be despised.

You'll know without question
that I'm in the thick of life with Israel,
That I'm your God, yes, *your* God,
the one and only real God.
Never again will my people be despised.
"And that's just the beginning: After that—
"I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters.
Your old men will dream,
your young men will see visions.
I'll even pour out my Spirit on the servants,
men and women both.
I'll set wonders in the sky above
and signs on the earth below:
Blood and fire and billowing smoke,
the sun turning black and the moon
blood-red,
Before the Judgment Day of God,
the Day tremendous and awesome.
Whoever calls, 'Help, God!'
gets help.
On Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be a great rescue—just
as God said.
Included in the survivors
are those that God calls."

We continue from last week's word from the prophet Jeremiah that spoke of a new covenant, moving to the prophet Joel. Joel is one of the minor prophets (minor meaning shorter writings, not lesser importance) who offers us three short chapters of prophecy. It's a book that can be hard to read. In the verses preceding today's reading, Joel's theological basis for his prophecies is rooted in "the day of the Lord," which speaks of terrible times and judgement, but also greatness and salvation.

Joel was well versed with the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. His words quote them, as well as Amos, Obadiah, Malachi, Zephaniah and Nahum. He knew his history and his predecessors. He knew of their predictions, their prophecies and their warnings to the people of Israel and Judah.

- God is a gracious and loving God, but God is also angry; Not just because of the disobedience that continued for generation after generation, but God was also upset with the lack of compassion toward all of creation – with the lack of love toward humanity.

In Joel's writings, he presents an apocalyptic "day of the Lord," the day when God's judgement will be through war, isolation and an end to fertility and production. Wild animals will cry out in hunger, wandering barren fields. They will be dying, nearing levels of extinction, from hunting and dried-up rivers and lakes. The land will stop producing. The environment will be under attack. Toxins, chemicals, poisons and natural disasters will culminate in an ecological nightmare. Joyful worship and offerings will cease. With septic waters and contaminated soil, no bread and no wine will come forth for the table. Unprecedented hunger and drought will abound. Like the eighth plague of locusts in Exodus will be the Lord's armies. All semblance of existence will be like a darkness. These are the images that Joel envisioned.

Joel's visions were overwhelming, but... he didn't stay there. Just like Jeremiah, Joel offered a vision of hope and the promise of restoration in the midst of judgement. His apocalyptic imagery hinted at the promise of a new heaven and a new earth.

As has been advertised, our fall book study is on ***Inspired by Rachel Held Evans***. In the chapter that we discussed this last week called *Resistance Stories*, Evans talked about how stories of resistance in the Bible referenced apocalyptic literature. It's a fascinating chapter and how appropriate that it can be referenced with today's scripture.

Joel's visions are seen as poetic, apocalyptic prophecies. When you think of apocalypse, or apocalyptic, what do you think of?

- "Revelation"

- 7-headed beasts, the 4 horsemen, etc.
- End of the world
- Horrible, terrible, warring, etc.

This is what Joel's visions sound like, but Rachel Held Evans reminds us of what apocalypse really means; "disclosing" or "unveiling." That's where we can get caught up and misguided with prophetic visions like Joel's, as well as those of the other prophets.

Joel's apocalyptic imagery "reveals things as they really are [and] peels back the layers of pomp and pretense, fear and uncertainty, to expose the true forces at work in the world."¹ "Biblical scholar Amy Jill-Levine in [her book] *The Meaning of the Bible* [explains], 'The point of apocalyptic texts is not to predict the future, it is to provide comfort in the present.'"²

Joel's apocalyptic imagery does exactly that. With his poetic and artistic imagery, he reveals things as they are and provides comfort and hope.

Joel's is not telling the Israelites, or us for that matter, anything we don't already know. They were living in challenging times, experiencing harsh conditions. The same could be said for us today; drought in the world is real, hunger in the world is real, slavery in the world is real, oppression in the world is real. Sin is real. We, as God's people, disobey. We stumble and falter in caring for God, humanity and creation as we ought to and it upsets God. God punishes us and we repent. This is what we struggle with as humans.

This is why Jesus Christ calls us to humble recognition of our need for God's grace.

When Joel speaks about war and destruction, we don't particularly find comfort, but we do when he envisions the verses we read today.

The soil will rejoice.
The animals will rejoice.
The children of Zion will rejoice.

All of creation will rejoice – this is Joel's apocalyptic vision. This is what he sees for all of God's children. In that vision lies our comfort and salvation in contrast to the judgement.

"Though the drought and locust have stolen and stripped, God 'will repay' the people for those lost years. The verb translated as repay stems from the same word group as the noun *shalom*,

¹ Held-Evans, Rachel. *Inspired*. Page 123.

² Ibid. Page 124.

with its implication of wholeness and restoration.”³ God promises more than simply monetary or materialistic compensation.

In Joel’s vision, God says, “never again will my people be despised, never again will my people be put to shame. You’ll know without question that I’m in the thick of life with you.”

As the people of God, in relationship with God, this new covenant experience will be greater and deeper, unlike you’ve experienced before. Equality will reign and the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out on **all flesh**; the earthy barriers that WE have created, those of sexism, ageism, racism and economic disparity will be gone.

Not only will young people dream far into the future, but the elderly will also. Not only will elders provide wise and prophetic visions vital for all to hear, so will the young. Women will prophesy and their voices will be respected. The oppressed and marginalized will speak out and the Spirit will trumpet their calls loud for all to hear.

Peter saw the fulfillment of Joel’s vision on the day of Pentecost in the coming of the Spirit on the gathered believers (Acts 2:17-21).

John Wesley, cleric, author, theologian and founder of Methodism, “described [Joel’s] prophetic activity as being ‘as full a knowledge of the mysteries of God’s law, as prophets before time had...[this] knowledge of God and his will shall abound among all ranks, sexes and ages [and will] not only equal, but surpass all that formerly was by prophecy, dreams or vision.’”

While God is at work in this vision, God asks us to work as well, in community.

In 1:14 and 2:15-16, Joel tells the Israelites the vital thing that has always been and always will be true in our covenant with God – we must come together in community! We must be a people united together for the benefit of all of creation. Joel says to gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land. Call a solemn assembly and gather the people; the aged, the children, even the infants. As a community, we are to **rend our hearts, not our clothing**. The Hebrew custom of tearing one’s clothing was an expression of extraordinary emotion, usually of grief, terror, or horror. In the new covenant, Joel (like Jeremiah) moves us beyond a law of tablets to a law of the heart. We will rend our hearts with joy.

When we think of Pentecost, it was not visions or dreams that the crowd experienced, it was the **actions** of the Holy Spirit descending on the followers of Jesus. Now they were Apostatized. They had the vision of what they should do in the coming months and years and set into motion. We are Apostatized, as well.

³ Connections. Year C, Volume 3, Season after Pentecost. Page 409.

Martin Luther King Jr. organized the massive March on Washington August 28th, 1963 and gave his brilliant "I Have a Dream" speech. With his vision of the future, he raised the conscience of the nation before God and the judgment seat of racial morality. In January 1964, Time magazine chose King as their Man of the Year. Martin Luther King was the first black American so honored. Later that year he became the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize as the youngest person to receive that honor. With that speech, Martin Luther King Jr. changed expectations in America, maybe even the world. He gave this nation a new vision.

Greta Thunberg began her vision of reversing climate damage at home with her parents, asking them to make changes in their daily lives. They supported her hopes and her beliefs so that she could make a difference in the world. Thunberg then started a climate protest all by herself, sitting alone in front of the Swedish Parliament with a sign that read, "School strike for the climate." She has been attacked by rightwing commentators, who claim she is too young or naive to know what she is talking about and is being manipulated by her parents. Hearing Joel's prophecies however, I see Thunberg as a young person with apocalyptic visions that reveal the layers of pomp and pretense, fear and uncertain, exposing the true forces at work in the world. Her speech at the United Nation in September was shockingly vulnerable in which she rendered her heart. Whether one agrees with her or not, she is providing us with new visions. I, for one, am listening.

A vision, dream, or plan of the future is vital to the success of every child of God. We live into our visions, dreams and plans without hesitation and faithfully because of the promises God made through the prophet, Joel, who said "Return to the Lord your God, for God is merciful and compassionate, patient, full of faithful love and ready to forgive" (2:13).

What is our vision?

What dreams do you have for a better world?

What visions are possible to move us forward, to bring others with us on the journey, to share Christ's teachings?

How will you play a part in it?

AMEN.