

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will
declare your praise.

**All: You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would
bring**

**it;
You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.**

MP 170 Give thanks with a grateful heart

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

The bible says: "The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to anger, and full of constant love." Let us pray:

Spirit of God,
you move where you will,
like gentle breeze or wind of storm,
like trickling brook or ocean vast,
like candle flame or forest fire,
and we thank you for your presence.

Spirit of God,
we see your wonders
in fingerprint whorls and colours of eye,
in adult voice and childhood laugh,
in language forms and silence full,
and we thank you for your presence.

Spirit of God,
we sense your leading
in creative thought and artistic hand,
in fruitful land and produce gleaned,
in labour's sweat and work that's done,
and we thank you for your presence.

Spirit of God,
we hear your voice
in song of praise and joyful face,

in repentant heart and beautiful tears,
in reconciled people and ways of peace,
and we thank you for your presence.

Let us close our prayer by saying the prayer Jesus taught us:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Joel 2:12-17 (OT page 912-913)
Reader: Andrew Coutts

Background to the reading

The book of Joel is the second of the 12 short prophetic books which together make up the concluding part of the OT. In all the translations the book of Joel has three chapters while in the original Masoretic text there are 4 chapters.

We do not know a lot about Joel except that he was the son of Pethuel. We also do not know the exact place of origin, however we can make several conclusion from the book itself like the reference to Zion the “holy hill” on which the temple was built in Jerusalem. Researchers agree that the time of origin would be around 400 BC. Apparently it seems as if there was a large plague of locusts who invested the land destroying all the crops, all the trees, and the vines. Nothing escaped their brutal attack. Men and animal were on the receiving end. The prophet seems to think that this is a sign of the imminence of the day of the Lord whereby God will finally judge the living and the dead. And because of the fact that they are living in the final days they must repent and show their remorse over all the things they did wrong in the eyes of God.

In our reading Joel cannot stress enough that the people need to wake up and repent. But this repentance cannot be a fake one. No they must fast, weep and mourn to show their genuine repentance. God will not be satisfied with anything else. He is not interested in any outward show like the tearing of the garments. In those days the tearing of the garments was

regarded as a respected deed of mourning and repentance. The Lord wants more. He wants them to change their hearts meaning they must get their priorities right. The prophet is urging them to return to the Lord because the Lord is compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love like it is also written in other passages throughout the Old Testament. The hope is that repentance will be followed by restoration. In particular, Joel looked for a restoration of the agricultural prosperity so that they could make offerings in the temple. This would be a sign that once again they were under God's favor.

The situation is so urgent that the prophet says that a public meeting should be held where all the people attend, the children, the elders even the bridegroom. In those days the groom was usually exempt from any public duty for a year after he got married. But the situation is desperate and asks for desperate measures. The trumpet refers to the "shophar" which was a ram's horn. In the Bible, the "shophar" most often signifies an important announcement or a call to arms. The priests are summoned too because they have to represent and intercede for the people before God. They must ask God for two things namely to have mercy on them and that the nations do not mock them. It is all about the honour of God. If they mock the people of God they are indeed dishonouring God. If this happens they can start asking: where is Israel's God? Why does He not intercede?

Joel tried to tell his people that God wants them to rethink their own position as a nation and as individuals. They need to turn to God again and serve Him with all their undivided attention and hearts.

MP 133 Father I place into your hands

Sermon

The text verse for the sermon is verse 12: 'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'

Today is the beginning of our stewardship campaign. Stewardship is all about a change in heart. It is about whom we are and how we respond in faith to the mercy and love of God. It is about our commitment to him and in our following him showing him the gratitude and honour that He deserves. Stewardship is all about giving thanks to God for everything He did for us.

If there is one sentence in the children's story of Thomas the tank engine that I really like then it is the Fat Controller saying to the trains: "Thomas you have been a really useful engine!"

How can we be useful?

We can be only useful once we realise who we are and what we have received in terms of gifts, talents and abilities.

We are all created by God according to His image. Sin destroyed the relationship between God and the human race but God came to the rescue when He sent His only Son to die on the cross. In our reading we can almost feel the tension of the broken relationship between God and his people Israel. We can sense the utter despair and anguish God has for His people wanted them to worship and obey him but they deserted him and created their own gods. But we also can hear the love God has for His people – He only wanted for them the best.

God gave humanity a new life and a new hope and new objectives – to live through faith in a relationship with Him. This relationship was made possible by God when He took away sin, death and hell. He gave believers a new journey with His Holy Spirit guiding and helping them.

So who are we? We are believers who know that God saved us from sin, death and hell. We are citizens to be of the eternal kingdom of God. We are humans that can discover our gifts and talents with the help of the Holy Spirit to enable us to be church on this earth to everyone that needs a roof over their heads and clean windows to look through by ways of speaking. We need to be church everywhere we go so that people can discover the Gospel of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. We need to be God's church for people that lost the plot and has become senseless wanderers without any meaning or direction in their lives. We need to be God's church everywhere – on our streets as we walk to the CO-OP, the Pharmacy, when we sit at the hairdressers (mindful not to be part of the usual gossip), when we blether to other people, when we go on the bus or the train. People do look at us differently. Most of the times people will want to see from us the love and forgiveness and inclusiveness of Christ. People will want to see our hearts pulsing with the love of God. They want to see how we do not judge, gossip but instead offer them something God has given us. And my oh my: how much has God given us?

He gives us so many gifts to be thankful about. Let us all refocus and start thinking again but this time with our changed hearts. Let us not say what the church can do for us but rather we are the church and look what we can do to make this congregation more stronger so that it can do God's work, proclaiming the Good News, reaching out to the needy and the vulnerable, teaching all about God's salvation, providing spiritual and pastoral care, baptising children and adults, celebrating Holy Communion, officiating marriages and funerals.

God gave us so much, why can't we show Him appreciation by using our gifts to His glory, praise and honour.

So let us focus in this month looking inwards into our hearts - to discover how we can be really useful in God's church on this earth!

Amen

Responding to God's word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **MP 624: 1,2,3 "Take my life, and let it be"**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Janice Anderson

MP 624:4,5,6 Take my life, and let it be

Benediction Receive the blessings of God and go in peace:

The blessing of the God of peace and justice
and the blessing of the Son who weeps the tears of the world's suffering
and the blessing of the Spirit
who inspires you to discover and use your talents will be with you;
from now into eternity.

Sung Amen