PENTECOST 20

Proper 25 - Year C

*This Bible study was written by **Patrick Keyser** for Proper 25 (C) in 2019.*

Joel 2:23-32

23 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.
24 The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25 I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army that I sent against you.

26 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.
27 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.

28 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.
29 Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days I will pour out my spirit.

30 I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. 32 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 from Patrick Keyser

This passage from the book of the prophet Joel begins by calling the children of Zion to rejoice as the writer tells of God's plentiful provision. The rain has come in abundance, the threshing floors overflow with grain, and the people of Zion will feast and give thanks to the Lord their God. The days of famine and destruction give way to the days of plenty and praise. The people of Israel will know that their God is among them, and they "shall never again be put to shame" (Joel 2:27, NRSV).

The writer then offers a vision of the outpouring of God's spirit on all flesh. This outpouring will be accompanied by prophecies, visions, and cosmic signs—the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. In the New Testament, this moment of outpouring of God's spirit is believed to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost as told in Acts 2. Peter stands and addresses a crowd in Jerusalem and quotes this portion of the prophet Joel to explain the events of that day (Acts 2:14-21).

The promise of this portion of Joel's prophecy is that God's spirit will indeed be poured out richly on God's people and that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Discussion Questions

How have you experienced the rich outpouring of God's spirit recently?

Psalm 65

[1] You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; *
to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem.
[2] To you that hear prayer shall all flesh come, *
because of their transgressions.
[3] Our sins are stronger than we are, *
but you will blot them out.
[4] Happy are they whom you choose
and draw to your courts to dwell there! *
they will be satisfied by the beauty of your house,
by the holiness of your temple.
[5] Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness,
O God of our salvation, *
O Hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the seas that are far away.
[6] You make fast the mountains by your power; *
they are girded about with might.
[7] You still the roaring of the seas, *
the roaring of their waves,
and the clamor of the peoples.
[8] Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; *
you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.
[9] You visit the earth and water it abundantly;
you make it very plenteous; *
the river of God is full of water.
[10] You prepare the grain, *
for so you provide for the earth.
[11] You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; *
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.
[12] You crown the year with your goodness, *
and your paths overflow with plenty.
[13] May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, *
and the hills be clothed with joy.
[14] May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; *
let them shout for joy and sing.

Commentary from Patrick Keyser

This psalm of praise is rich in agricultural imagery and vividly describes God's provision for the earth and all creatures. God visits the earth to give water in abundance and in turn, provides grain and food for God's people. The psalmist speaks both of God's sovereignty and of God's gracious care. For the psalmist, the obvious response of the people of this earth to such goodness is awe and praise— "those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs" (Psalm 65:8, BCP).

The psalm begins, however, by acknowledging the need for all transgressors to come to God. One of God's greatest provisions for us, the psalmist indicates, is forgiveness— "our sins are stronger than we are, but you will blot them out" (Psalm 65:3). Those who experience this forgiveness can join the psalmist in saying, "awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation, O Hope of all the ends of the earth and of the seas that are far away" (Psalm 65:5).

Discussion Questions

How are you reminded of God's gentle and gracious care and provision for yourself, the earth, and all creatures?

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

[6] As for me, I am already being poured out as a
libation, and the time of my departure has come. [7] I
have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I
have kept the faith. [8] 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.

[16] At my first defense no one came to my support, but
all deserted me. May it not be counted against
them! [17] 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. [18] 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 from Patrick Keyser

The second letter to Timothy is written by a devoted follower of Jesus at the end of his life to his younger companion in the faith, Timothy. This passage comes at the end of the letter as the writer acknowledges that his time is almost up. He has "fought the good fight" and "kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7, NRSV). He did so even in moments when remaining faithful wasn't easy. The writer tells that in a moment of need, no one came to help him, but instead his friends deserted him. Yet, at no point did God abandon him. The writer states that God strengthened him so that the message of the gospel could be spread. As he closes this letter, the writer seeks to remind Timothy—and us as well—that God is faithful and will never abandon us, no matter the circumstances.

Discussion Questions

How have you experienced God's presence and faithfulness in the midst of hardship or difficulty?

Luke 18:9-14

[9] He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: [10] "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] 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. [12] I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' [14] 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 from Patrick Keyser

In this portion of Luke's Gospel, Jesus offers a parable to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt" (Luke 18:9). To teach this lesson, Jesus describes two individuals who in his time would have been seen as examples of virtuous and corrupt living—a Pharisee was a member of the religious authorities and a spiritual leader while a tax collector was one who gained money through dishonest dealings and was generally despised by many. Jesus tells that these two went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee's prayer is really just a speech meant to bring attention to himself. The Pharisee extols his own piety and his commitment to spiritual disciplines. He is self-congratulatory and confidently pleased that he is "not like other people" (Luke 18:11).

The tax collector, on the other hand, offers a prayer of humble and genuine contrition. He is aware of his sins and shortcomings, he acknowledges that he is a sinner, and he pleads for God's mercy. This person, Jesus teaches, is the one who leaves that place justified. Once again, Jesus offers a parable that completely reverses expectations. The tax collector, the one seen as corrupt and morally bankrupt, is offered as an example to follow while the religious official is characterized as self-absorbed and haughty.

This parable is an invitation to remember that humility is central to the Christian life. Jesus offers the example of the tax collector to show us the importance of remembering that we are sinners always in need of God's mercy. God does not seek empty piety; God seeks genuine and authentic relationship with us. We can only do that when we come to God, like the tax collector, in a state of humility and honesty.

Discussion Questions

In what ways might God be inviting you, like the tax collector, to be fully genuine in your life of prayer?

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