



February 26-29, 2020

## Wednesday, February 26

**Scripture:** Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 (NRSV)

**Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near – a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.**

**Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even the infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, *Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, Where is their God?***

### **Devotional:**

In Chapter 2 of Joel, the prophet says, *Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain*, thus warning of a coming catastrophe brought on by the unfaithfulness of God's people in Judah about 350 B.C. The apocalyptic language is frightening in the verses that follow, but not without hope. In verse 13, Joel urges *to return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful. Slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.*

As we begin Lent, Joel's call to repentance is a familiar call from Old Testament prophets, and one that is still needed today. Repentance requires self-examination with questions like:

*Am I representing Christ well?*

*Am I living the way I claim to believe?*

*Do I really practice my faith every day in every way?*

Honest answers to these questions can lead to spiritual growth and mark our preparation during the Lenten season. May we begin our journey to the cross with confession and repentance so that our steps may be lighter, our minds open to the Spirit's leading, and with our eyes set on the glorious resurrection.

### **Prayer:**

Gracious God, as we begin looking toward the cross and the empty tomb, forgive us when we get so caught up in our everyday activities that we forget *whose we are*. Guide our living so we may always be instruments of your love wherever we are. May we be especially open to the Holy Spirit during this season and throughout the year. Thank you for the love and sacrifice you made for us through Jesus Christ and it is in his name we pray. Amen.

**Submitted by: Skeet Ayscue**

## Thursday, February 27

**Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-2 (NRSV)**

**Shout out, do not hold back! Lift up your voice like a trumpet! Announce to my people their rebellion, to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. *Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?* Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers. Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high. Is such the fast that I choose, a day to humble oneself? Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush, and to lie in sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.**

### **Devotional:**

When many of us think of Lent, we think of giving up something during that forty-day period that we think may make us better people or better Christians. We give up soft drinks, candy, chocolate, cigarettes, alcohol, or other pleasures only to return to them at the end of Lent. What have we really accomplished? The writer of Isaiah indicates that we have accomplished nothing. *Look, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to strike with a wicked fist. Such fasting as you do today will not make your voice heard on high.*

Instead, we should look inward spiritually and explore our prayer life, read the scriptures, and perhaps develop plans of action such as volunteer work, possibly at SCCM, Homes of Hope, Habitat for Humanity, the Community Inn, or the hospital. We should look at ways to spread the love of God and the teachings of Jesus. *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Further, the writer says, Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? . . . If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.* It seems that the writer is saying that we need to remove material things that do not allow our souls to shine, and to carry our lamps of hope and love to those less fortunate than we are.

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The season of Lent should be a time of sacrifice, but it should also be a time of spiritual reflection that results in action. Give up chocolate, but plan to volunteer at the Community Table. Give up soft drinks, but assist with the Community Food Pantry. Give up time in front of your device screens, but plan to help mentor or tutor at Central Elementary School. Volunteer for scouting. Offer to help with a church activity.

Certainly feel free to give up your favorite vice, but in its place, add a time of service to your community for God.

**Prayer:**

Create in me a clean heart, oh God. And renew a right spirit within me. Allow me to reflect your love and redemption as I seek to do your will inwardly, and to provide love and action to our community outwardly. Amen.

**Submitted by: Nathan Sanges**

## Friday, February 28

**Scripture: II Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 (ERV)**

**So we have been sent to speak for Christ. It is like God is calling to people through us. We speak for Christ when we beg you to be at peace with God. Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ, we could be right with God.**

**We are workers together with God. So we beg you: Don't let the grace that you received from God be for nothing. God says,**

***I heard you at the right time, and I gave you help on the day of salvation. I tell you that the right time is now. The day of salvation is now.***

**We don't want people to find anything wrong with our work. So we do nothing that will be a problem to others. But in every way we show that we are servants of God. We never give up, even though we face troubles, difficulties, and problems of every kind. We are beaten and thrown into prison. People get upset at us and fight against us. We work hard, and sometimes we get no sleep or food. We show that we are God's servants by our pure lives, by our understanding, by our patience, and by our kindness. We show it by the Holy Spirit, by genuine love, by speaking truth, and by depending on God's power. This right way of living has prepared us to defend ourselves against every kind of attack. Some people honor us, but others shame us. Some people say good things about us, but others say bad things. Some people say we are liars, but we speak truth. To some people we are not known, but we are well known. We seem to be dying, but look! We continue to live. We are punished, but we are not killed. We have much sadness, but we are always rejoicing. We are poor, but we are making many people rich in faith. We have nothing, but really we have everything.**

### **Devotional:**

We have all overheard a cell phone conversation in the grocery store, a restaurant, or at work. Most of the time, even though you can only hear one side of the phone discussion, you can usually tell by the tone of their voice and word choice, how the person you are hearing feels about the conversation. Reading II Corinthians 2 felt like that to me. We do not know every detail of what was going on at the church in Corinth in 55 A.D., but in his letter to the church there, Paul seems to be pleading with the Corinthians to recognize his authority as an apostle and imploring them to turn away from false teachers and turn to God – now! Paul lays out his feelings of joy and sorrow, hope and frustration to the believers there. Though written centuries ago, Paul's letter reminds us of our own journeys as Christians in the twenty-first century. With so much noise, distraction, and general *busyness* in our day-to-day lives, it is easy to lose sight of our purpose and calling to be reconciled with Christ. But, when we recognize God's ambassadors (sometimes in the form of unlikely messengers), and we work to be Christ's ambassadors in our broken world, we find our salvation.

### **Prayer:**

Great God, help us to recognize your unlikely apostles in our modern world and work within our hearts to be the unexpected ambassadors of your word to your people. Amen.

**Submitted by: Jane Booone**

# Saturday, February 29

**Scripture: Matthew 6:1-6; 16-21**

**Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

**And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

**And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

## **Devotional:**

In reading through these verses from Matthew, I am reminded of a friend of mine – let's call him *Tom*. *Tom* is a gifted church member that can do almost anything. Lead a church committee? (Sure.) Feed a few hundred? (Why not?) Move chairs and tables or clear brush from a community hit by bad weather. (I've got a little time.) All is done with ease and a smile.

When complimented on his abilities, *Tom* uses a simple reply, *Thanks. I'm glad you think so.* or *Thanks, it was fun to do.* Then he moves along in the conversation. *Tom* is not one to belittle his gifts, but he is not boastful or prideful. Best of all, *Tom* leaves you with the feeling that he really enjoyed the task, and you wish you had been part of his team! I think *Tom* is the type person Jesus hopes we all are.

God does not want us to make light of the gifts and talents we have been given, and talents should be used – not hidden away. What the scripture is asking us to do is examine our hearts and motivations. Are we being the hands and feet of God or are we seeking recognition from those around us?

Through watching *Tom*, I understand that God does not ask us to demean or belittle the gifts we have been given, but to use them with the *body of Christ* as an integral part of the whole.

Luckily, we have many *Toms* in our church family. People who live by example and in doing so, teach all of us to live more genuine lives.

## **Prayer:**

Dear Lord, thank you for the many *Toms* in our lives. Help me to use the talents you have given me to the best of my ability. Teach me to accept compliments and recognition with humility and remember that all gifts come from you. Amen.

**Submitted by: Barbara McManus**