

Sermon for 26 October 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost/Reformation Sunday

Scriptures: Joel 2:23-32; Psalter: Page 789, Psalm 65; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14

After nine consecutive Sundays starting with the “weeping prophet,” Jeremiah, today we begin our lectionary lessons with the prophet Joel. Much briefer than Jeremiah, his second chapter is full of wonderful descriptions.

What it will be like to survive hard times? “O children of Zion, be glad, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication...”

It’s a short quote, and if we dig deeper, we find him just as clearly focusing on *dark* times....but for today, let’s savor the let-up in gloom. Scholars are not sure when this book was written... somewhere between the eighth century before Christ and the second century ... which reminds us that this guide-book we put so much confidence in I’m talking about the Bible ... is not so much a GPS or a map as it is a prayer guide. Right now, listen to the ways we can give thanks, and see and feel some hope ...

Likewise, Psalm 65 starts with joy, and ends with joy. Listen: “Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed, O you who answer prayer!” ...and closes with “You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.” In the middle of hard times ...Look, for example, at the White House, if you want to get angry or confused... and then listen again ... read some more...

But we still use Second Timothy to remind ourselves how specific following God was in the first couple of generations of the church. See how Paul is willing to use himself as an example to follow, even as he openly says he knows he’s the chief of sinners and has to start over and over day by day... It’s all well-suited to current circumstances: “So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

But what’s this about the Pharisee and the Publican, in the Gospel reading? Over and over we have a very human Jesus trying to get across with what seems a kind of clumsy story, a very plain point: We’re not so important. It’s the story that matters. If you can get just a tiny bit of the success around you and hold onto it, you’ll be both king and queen. God is pushing and pulling you and me through that narrow gate, and it’s going to be all right. So go for it ... Don’t thank me, thank the whole magnificent operation that’s going on now. Look at the people who are resisting evil. Right now. Look at what’s falling apart that should have long ago... It’s not politics ... it’s right and wrong, Love for me, and love for you!

We have lots to do, and deep breaths to take together. This is the dance we want to dance. Here is where we belong.

Let us pray: Heavenly Influencer, bring us together. Show us how much good news we’re telling the world just because we are here and soon will be out there again, until next week brings us back here together. This is an exciting tale you are teaching, and training us to tell.

God, we are slow... We church folks have lots to work on. Heal us, bring us together, teach us not to be afraid, or even self-centered ... just the plain and perfect signs you have already made us into. Amen.