

The Parish of Peasedown St John

Ash Wednesday 9th February 2005

'U Turns Permitted'

Joel 2: 1-2 & 12-17

Passage, Sermon Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these sermon notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

1. Sermon Passage

Joel 2: 1-2 & 12-17

1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand--

2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.

12 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.'

13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-- grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.

15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.

16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?''

2. Gospel Passage

John 8:1-11

1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.

3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group

4 and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.

5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"

6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.

7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.

10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

3. Sermon Notes

- Joel urges the people of God to turn from their sin and turn back to God: 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (Joel 2:12-13)
- The observance of the season of Lent begins with the acknowledgment of our need to examine ourselves, to turn away from our sin and return to the Lord. "To make a U turn if possible."
- Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Lent is not only a time for penitence but also a time for turning our lives around. It is a time for placing behind us the failures of the past and turning back toward God.
- Joel warns the people of God that continued sin will reap destruction, but turning away from sin and returning to the Lord will bring about God's forgiveness. God says to his people in effect "Hey, if you will just stop sinning, I will bring about a positive change in your lives."
- We discover God's plan for our restoration with our willingness to admit our failure and make that all important 'U-turn.'
- Ash Wednesday then serves as a symbol of the beginning of a journey that will take us 40 days to complete. The season of Lent provides us with many chances to take our eyes off the obstacles in our paths and look for the opportunities that are ahead.
- This focus on God will move us through a process of transformation that is essential to our Christian growth. This transformation is a life-long process that can begin for us today as we reflect on the meaning of Ash Wednesday.
- Will Ash Wednesday just be an empty ritual or will the days of Lent serve as an opportunity for us to have a new encounter with God? This encounter with God begins with our authentic worship: praying, reading scriptures, sharing in the sacraments, and giving ourselves to reconciliation through acts of repentance and renewal.
- Is there something in your life that has you going in the wrong direction? Have you resisted the instructions to turn around? Have you just simply said to yourself, "I've gone too far to turn back now"? Hear the words of the prophet Joel, 'Return to your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.'

4. Questions to consider

4.1 What opportunities do you think God may be calling you to take up during this season of Lent?

4.2 What might God be calling you to turn your back on during this season of Lent?

4.3 A close friend of yours from church confides in you that they are struggling with a habitual sin, what would you suggest that they do?

If you would like to discuss these questions further please feel free to call me on 01761 432293.