

Scripture Readings and Sermon

November 21, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Joel 2:21-27

(The Lord is your vindication)

The Book of Joel occurs after the fall of the northern tribes of Israel. It is unclear, however, if the book is written before or after the exile of Judah. Given the uncertainty of the period, the locust could be both literal and metaphoric. The first part of Joel is a call to repentance and a warning of judgment. The second part, beginning in 2:18, is a promise of restoration for all those who repent. It is in this section that the two most famous passages of Joel are found. The one used today is generally reserved for the Thanksgiving season. The section following this passage is used during Pentecost. Both passages promise abundance during the times of harvest (Fall and Spring).

Joel 2:27 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.

When have you felt God in your midst?

Does God feel close at hand or far away right now?

How do you give thanks when God feels far away?

What does it mean to you when Wesley was told to preach faith until he had faith?

By giving thanks even for the little things, does it create in us a heart full of thanksgiving?

When we begin to find reasons to give thanks, is it easier to see God in our midst?

Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:1-7 (Prayers and Thanksgiving)

The letter to Timothy has been dated by some authors at 65 A.D. just before Paul's death. This places the letter one year before the start of the Jewish rebellion against Rome and one year after the Great Fire of Rome which Nero blamed on the Christians. This may be the reason why Paul specifically mentions praying for "kings and all who are in high positions". Paul was most likely witnessing the execution of Christians by fire and wanting stability to return to Rome. Paul also probably does not want to see the church pulled into the Jewish rebellion. The first reason is that Jesus himself resisted those who wanted him to lead a rebellion. The second reason is, like Jesus, Paul was focused on the coming Kingdom of God which would replace all earthly kingdoms. Finally, Paul wishes to focus Timothy's attention on prayer above all else. It is in prayer that Timothy will discern God's will. Prayer does not simply mean lifting up our supplications, intercessions, and thanksgivings to God but also actively listening to how God wants us to respond. Prayers may lead to sense of peace or it may prompt us to actions. The more people pray, the more they will "come the knowledge of the truth" by encountering Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

1 Timothy 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone.

Who is it easy to pray for?

Who is it hard to pray for and why?

Can we give thanks for someone before we have forgiven them?

If we say we forgiven them but can't give thanks, have we forgiven them in our heart?

What helps you to pray for those you disagree with or even hate?

Can you find at least one reason to give thanks for everyone you know?

Commentary on John 18:33-37

(Are You the King?)

This is the last day of the Christian Year. The first day starts with Advent as the Church awaits the savior and ends once again with the Church anxiously awaiting the return of our Savior, Jesus

Christ. In the Gospel of John, the eternal kingship of Jesus has not yet been revealed. Some want Jesus to lead an earthly rebellion against Rome and others are using that to try and prove treason. Based on these two forces at work in Jerusalem, Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus' kingship, however, extends far beyond one nationality or race. Jesus speaks of his kingdom not being of this world but Pilate has no point of reference for this claim. Through the rest of scripture, unlike Pilate we have been given a glimpse of the eternal kingdom of God. We work in the "now" but we long for the "not yet" of Jesus' return. This is why we celebrate Christ the King Sunday.

John 18:37 Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king."

What does it mean to be king in a world where there are very few kings?

Is this image outdated? What title today means total obedience and reliance?

Is this especially hard in a culture of individualism?

What does it mean for you to say that Jesus is Lord or ruler of your life?

How does it or should it effect your daily decisions?

Without daily prayer, is Jesus more of an absentee landlord rather than king?

Reflection on John 18:33-38a, Joel 2:21-27, 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Sermon "What is truth?"

Pilate's question, "What is truth?", seems as relevant today as it did two thousand years ago. Even those chosen to lead nations fail to agree on what is truth. Truth seems to be relative to one's own personal agenda. If one truth puts into question a belief or a means of income then another truth is produced to justify their position. It is therefore not surprising that a seasoned public official like Pilate would ask "What is truth?".

Jesus, however, points to an understanding of truth that goes deeper than personal agendas or relativistic philosophy. Scripture states clearly that God is the source of all truth. Truth is not relative to the individual but is based on the certainty of God. While individuals may perceive God differently, that does not negate the truth. This truth is the light (John 3:21) revealed in the word (John 17:17) and the law (Psalm 119:142). Since Jesus is the light, the word, and fulfillment of the law then Jesus is the revelation of the truth of God (John 5:33, John 14:6, John 18:37). Through Jesus, this truth dwells in the heart by the Spirit (John 4:24, John 14:6, John 15:26, John 16:13, John 17:17, 1 John 5:6). The Spirit places the truth in the heart (Psalm 51:6, Psalm 25:5) revealing God's reign in our lives. It is by the Spirit that the kingdom of God is made known (John 3:3-5). Jesus, therefore, tells Pilate that Jesus' kingdom is not of this world but can only be perceived through the truth to which Jesus bears witness.

In this discussion about kings and kingdoms, Jesus points to a reality which transcends political systems of the world. For the writers of the Old Testament, truth was related to faithfulness (1 Samuel 12:24, Psalm 25:5, Psalm 145:18). When the truth is in our hearts, we are faithful to God and God is near. The truth reveals God's kingdom in our midst. In Joel, the rains were a sign of the truth that God is in our midst. By living in the truth, we will never be put to shame for God will always vindicate us. The truth will out as Shakespeare writes in *The Merchant of Venice*.

When we live in the truth, we come to the realization that everything is a gift of the King, our God. Since everything is a gift, we should always make supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings. At times, however, it is hard to see events or people as a gift from God. They can often become the crucible upon which our ideas or dreams are crushed. While this process can be excruciating, the hole created can become space for an even greater gift from God. And so Paul urges us to give thanks for everyone including earthly rulers. In addition, Paul reminds us to pray that they too may come to the knowledge of truth so that they may live as citizens of God kingdom and not simply kings in their own minds.

The issue of kings and truth at first appears archaic and abstract but when grounded in Jesus these ideas can lead us away from illusions of power and into life abundantly. On this Christ the King

Sunday, may we once again let the truth enter our hearts and with thanksgiving proclaim that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords.