

Joel 2 - Chapter 2, verses 1 – 17

These verses can easily be divided into two sections namely : Verses 1 – 14, the Judgement of the Lord and a possibility of repentance; Verses 15 – 17, the call to confession and restoration.

Can I suggest that you use these two sections on Ash Wednesday for meditation and prayer?

The traditional reading for that day is Joel chapter 2, verses 12 – 17. It is appropriate that we do come before the Lord our God in repentance and prayer, at this time of uncertainty and economic crisis. Even if we do control the spread of the virus, tremendous damage has been caused to the economy, and to the well-being of millions of fellow human beings, both here and overseas.

Verses 1 – 2:- The call to “*Blow the trumpet . . .*” is to sound the alarm. It reads as though the watchmen on the walls have seen the invader and call the people to arms. The huge swarms of locusts would cover the sky and obscure the sun. There was, and is, no avoiding the disaster brought by the plagues of insects.

Verses 3 – 11:- A graphic description of the appearance and damage done by locusts. Close up the head of a locust does look horse-like. The sound of the swarm is like crackling flames and apparently can be heard up to 6 miles away! This is an eye witness account of a historic locust plague, too realistic to be second hand! Note that the host of locusts are referred to as the army of the Lord - “*his host is exceedingly great;*” verse 11. the Lord God is in control and the disaster is his judgement on a wayward and sinful people.

Verses 12 – 14:- The word of the Lord through his prophet is a call to repentance. The people of Israel were chosen and called to be witnesses of God’s righteousness and love for the nations – read again Exodus 19, verses 5 – 6.

Verse 14 is another awkward verse written from a human perspective! How can the unchanging, unchangeable Lord God “*turn and repent, . . .*”? From a human view point this may appear to be what happens. However, He has his own Divine ways of dealing with sinful human beings. Although unchangeable in his attitudes towards sin, God may still show mercy on his sinful people. A new harvest will make the meal and wine offerings possible once again.

Verses 12 – 17:- This portion appointed for Ash Wednesday is rightly a call to repentance and renewal: just as desperately needed now as it was then. The call is to the whole nation to come together in fasting and prayer.

There are no exceptions, no one is exempt! The whole people of God is called to repentance, even an impending marriage ceremony is no excuse! - see Deuteronomy 24, verse 5.

When did your church (or mine!) last come before the Lord God in unanimity to repent of the sins of the people and nation?

Maybe the obedience of the church leaders would be key in making this call to repentance a reality:-

Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say “Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” (verse 17)

The “priests”, “pastors”, “elders”, whatever you call your church leadership, they have the prime responsibility - **To lead!** Not just in things where there may be a “feel good factor” but in the spiritual life of the People of God.

Pray for them this Lent, that the leadership of the churches may be “*Holy unto the Lord*” (Exodus 28, verses 36 – 38).

In your time of prayer it would be good to re-read Isaiah 6, verses 1 – 8. Asking the Lord for a renewed vision of Him. For a cleansing through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and fresh empowering by the Holy Spirit for witnessing to those around us.