

GOD IS FORGIVING

THE LESSON: JOEL 2

It has always been God’s desire to make a way home for his wayward children. In the book of Genesis we find what theologians call the “protoevangelium” – the first hint of the Gospel. When that first act of human disobedience (sin) brought about such catastrophe, and the dire consequences were laid out to Adam and Eve, a tiny glimmer of hope also appeared (Genesis 3:15). From the very beginning God’s plan was to send Jesus to the cross so that he could triumph over sin and death.

Throughout the Old Testament, the plan became clearer. The law showed God’s people when they had gone wrong, and provided a way to return to him in repentance and obtain forgiveness through repeated sacrifice. (These sacrifices only offered a glimpse of the *real* sacrifice that was yet to come). But too often God’s people rebelled instead of turning to their Father, who kept longing for them to return.

And so “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:12). And now we know that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The Father, who has always longed to forgive his wayward children, has made a way home for us. And when we *do* repent and return to him, there is great joy in heaven as a result (Luke 15:7, 10).

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The Book of Joel contains the message of one of the Old Testament prophets, whose task it was to speak God’s word to his people, reminding them of how they should live and calling them to repentance. The passage we’re about to look at is traditionally read on Ash Wednesday, a day on which we prepare our hearts for the penitential season of Lent.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Set aside some time this week to reflect on God’s forgiving nature, and to bring to him your sins in sincere repentance. Close your time with this prayer:

O most mighty God, and merciful Father, who hast compassion upon all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made; who wouldest not the death of a sinner, but that he should rather turn from his sin, and be saved: Mercifully forgive our trespasses; receive and comfort us, who are grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins. Thy property is always to have mercy; to thee only it appertaineth to forgive sins. Spare, O Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed; enter not into judgement with thy servants, who truly repent us of our faults, but so make haste to help us in this world, that we may ever live with thee in the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(FROM THE PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP, P. 613)

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JOEL 2: **A REASON TO RETURN**

¹²“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. ¹⁴Who 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?

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. ¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, “Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

¹⁸Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.