

Scripture: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
Date: March 9, 2011
Service: Ash Wednesday
Place: St. Mark's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Canon James M. Dorn III, Rector

Spare your people Lord.

Let us pray,

Lord Jesus Christ, during this season of Lent, please remind us that you seek mercy rather than sacrifice. Instead of denying ourselves easy and simple bodily pleasures, strengthen us to share the spiritual food of Jesus with our neighbor and lead us to help those who are less fortunate than we are so that they will come to know your love. Amen.

In these times of national political unrest, economic uncertainty, wars, terrorism, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters, Jesus Christ expects us to give the only thing we can truly give to the Lord; our selves, our souls, and our bodies. The things I mentioned, we have no control over and they can take away everything or almost everything we hold dear in our hearts but what I did not mention is that personal tragedy, and the choices we make can also remove what is near and dear to our hearts. Because we realize the world can remove everything from us, we ignore we were created from dust and to dust we shall return and what happens in our lives between dust to dust is what really matters.

During the times in our lives when we cannot change what happens; we can change ourselves and when those difficult and unbearable times hit we realize, "There is nothing we can do to change our situation except cry out to God and say, 'Spare us Lord.'"

From the prophet Joel we see how much God gives and how little control we have over our lives. Joel speaks of a land where all the crops are destroyed and the Israelites have been conquered, leaving nothing to eat, nothing to drink, nothing to buy, no money, and only dying people and God remain. Everything seems hopeless because there is nothing, nothing to feed themselves, and nothing to give the Lord. Everyone is suffering; however, the prophet Joel cries out for them to do something.

The priests are told to call all the people together, to sanctify a fast, and to assemble in order to cry out to the Lord because unless things change, ultimate and final destruction will come and there will no longer be any joy or gladness from the House of God. This is a time when God's judgment is upon them, a judgment so terrible no one will be able to endure it. However, all is not lost because the Lord says, "Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; give me your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing."

So today, we are assembled to bring what the Lord truly wants from the congregation of the faithful, our hearts. And in the midst of his people, the priest cries out, "Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery. Why should it be said among the peoples, "Where is their God?"

Today, the mockery of the children of God ends when you surrender to Jesus Christ the only thing you can give; your heart, your mind, and your body. Today begins a fast, a fast from things keeping you from the love of the Lord and all of the blessings He has given you and wants to give you; because, the government cannot give you what you truly need, your friends cannot give you what you truly need, your family cannot give you what you truly need, excess food and money cannot give you what you truly need, only God through Jesus Christ can give you what you need.

And if you need help in what to fast from this Lent fast and feast on these:

Fast from lust and feast on purity.

Fast from gluttony and feast on self-control, abstinence, and moderation.

Fast from greed and feast on charity and generosity.

Fast from laziness and feast on diligence.

Fast from anger and feast on peace and patience.

Fast from envy and feast on satisfaction and kindness.

Fast from pride and feast on humility and modesty.

During Lent; repent of your sins, pray and listen to the Holy Spirit, love everyone especially yourself because when you return to the Lord Jesus, He will have pity on you and He will give you what you need. With Jesus Christ in your life you will be satisfied no matter what your circumstances are and each day you draw closer to the Lord, you will realize that Christ is in the middle of your life and He is your God and the Spirit of the Lord will be with you forever.

Remember, you are dust and to dust you shall return. Only your soul, your spiritual body, will last forever in the presence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.