

“Day of the Lord”
Sermon – October 26, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

Your heart rate increases, you feel the adrenaline starting to surge through your body, you prepare to fight, flee, or freeze.

You are exhibiting the adaptive, primal emotion that alerts you to danger, a survival mechanism involving both psychological and physiological responses to a perceived threat. An emotion called—fear.

Fear is one of the strongest and most primitive emotions, one that was, and to lesser extent today, necessary for our survival. When you’re out on the savannah where wild animals that are stronger and faster than you can kill you, fear can help keep you alive.

For an immediate response fear is a greater motivator than reward. If your boss at work says they’ll give you a bonus if you get the project done by the end of the week, that is probably not as much of a motivator than if they say you’ll be docked from your pay if it’s not done.

But fear is not a good motivator for the long run. Partially, because the behavior it induces is to avoid the pain and it’s an extrinsic motivator—take away the threat and the behavior tends to stop.

Also, fear is not good for your body or mental health. The physiological and psychological demands wear and tear on you.

Yet, fear is still a big part of shaping our behavior. Our political leaders today wield like a sword, driving people to do and accept things they never would have dreamed of even a year ago.

The pervasive onslaught of media of all kinds pounds the steady drumbeat of fear—fear of the “other” of what they can and will do to you, even when it is total fabrication.

We see it in religion also. Christianity—and the Bible—has a strong element of it. Believe—or burn in hell. Like me, you probably have heard

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“fire-and-brimstone” sermons in your life, with vivid descriptions of judgment and eternal damnation to encourage you to repent and save your soul. The focus tended to be on “believing” that Jesus was your Lord and Savior and less what do you do and how do you behave differently as a result.

Today’s Old Testament lesson is from the prophet Joel, one of the 12 so-called “minor” prophets—minor because of the length of their books, not the importance of their message.

Still, other than today, the only other time we hear directly from Joel in our three-year lectionary cycle is on Ash Wednesday.

In the first chapter, Joel describes a plague of locusts lasting several years upon people. Literally everything that might provide sustenance is utterly devastated. Food sources disappear; livestock together with the entire nation teeter on the edge of utter annihilation.

Chapter 2 begins saying, “Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near— a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!

Then the people are urged to return to the LORD, to fast, to repent, and to call upon the LORD to spare them.

Verse 17 says in part, “Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, ‘Spare your people, O Lord.’”

Fear certainly seems to be a motivator here, a consequence for disobeying God.

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But then verse 18 says, “Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.”

It continues in this vein until we get to our lectionary passage starting in verse 23, which says, “O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication.”

It follows with “The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil”, “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied”, and so on. In short, it is a vision of abundance.

This vision contrasts starkly with the many verses before it that describe Israel’s deprivation and suffering. Despite that current reality for the Israelites, our lectionary passage focuses on the positive emotions of joy and gladness. That is God’s destiny for humanity. Rather than a state of constant worry and trepidation, we see anxiety quickly relieved by the early rains.

Verse 27 then says, “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.”

We then hear verses 28-32, which start with “Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” and conclude with “The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved;

The passage should sound familiar because on Pentecost we hear Peter quote these passages as an interpretation of the work of the Holy Spirit.

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Both passages, as well as several other places throughout the Bible, speak of the “day of the LORD.” This concept comes from prophets describing Yahweh’s judgment on Israel and Judah in the near future because of the people’s failure to follow Yahweh’s commandments. In this way, destruction is ultimately brought upon by ourselves. Thus, we are suffering not because of God’s capriciousness but because we have been disobedient.

In an era like ours and in a culture hallmarked by a fear of scarcity, it is difficult to live lives that are unstinting and free of anxiety about the future. Nevertheless, believers can and do live freely, hopefully, and generously because we know a secret: the God of abundance has promised to care for us at the “hungry feast” until our longings -- and those of the world -- are fully and forever satisfied.

Most prophetic literature consists of oracles of desolation, like the beginning of Joel does, but we often turn to the prophets for oracles of consolation as well, which today’s passage from Joel does.

Metaphorically, like the drought in Joel, we also find times of spiritual dryness and spiritual abundance in our own lives and that is simply part of life.

False Christianity in the guise of the Prosperity Gospel, as it is called, denies this reality. It only promises moving from strength to strength, promises only miracles and sunshine, tempts us to put empire before God and place all our trust in it rather than in God.

This is why “I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other” is at the center of our passage. Joel does not describe a God who removes all suffering from our daily life. While we should never seek out

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suffering, we will be tempted to turn to the empire or the Prosperity Gospel if we cannot accept suffering in life.

What Joel describes is a God for all people, especially the marginalized.

God will pour out the Spirit on the lowly slaves just as God pours out the Spirit on everyone else.

The Prosperity Gospel and the empires of this world deny this reality. For them, God is only found among the rich, healthy, and prosperous.

This is a different God than Joel describes and a different gospel than Jesus preaches.

Joel’s words come resounding back to us: there is no other. When we substitute prosperity and empire for the God of Israel, we are ultimately worshiping idols.

Idols are the things that compete with God in our society, whether it is consumerism, nationalism, or narcissism. Joel makes a simple promise to us. If we turn away from the idols, no matter what they may be for us, we will be saved. Rather than an abundance of money or power, we are promised an abundance of meaning and love.

And that is what motivates us. We know that since Pentecost that the Day of the Lord has started. And we do not wait around for its culmination in the Second Coming of Jesus either out of fear of judgment or smugness that others will get their just desserts.

Instead, we go forward with the confidence that God is with us now and expects us to do his will now. Not at the end of days but today—until the end of our days, when we will join Christ in Paradise.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.
Amen.