

Sermon: 2020/02/26 ("Ash Wednesday") - Joel 2:1-2,12-17; Psalm 103; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6,16-21_BTR

Joel "paints" a *terrifying* picture of *imminent* catastrophe.

Of 'a great and powerful army' descending upon Jerusalem.

At a distance, this force is so *vast* - it contains so many combatants - that they spread out to fill the entirety of the far horizon, like some *massive*, dirty smudge of pollution smeared across the landscape.

And these events he describes as, 'the day of the Lord'.

And that term - "Day of the Lord" - we normally a-fix, of course, to the singular, *eschatological* happenings associated with the "Last Things."

Such as the general resurrection and the judgement of humanity when the 'Book of Life' is opened.

But was Joel (actually) envisioning such?

Or is it that, rather than a *spiritual* vision, a supernatural glimpse of the future given by the Holy Spirit, these verses are "merely" a testament to an actual scene he had the misfortune to behold, of *earthly* legions descending from the far East - the Assyrians or Babylonians?

Certainly what we see on this page *appears* Apocalyptic.

Indeed, both those empires could put into the field hundreds of thousands of infantry and cavalry.

And they were formidable troops, far superior to anything little Israel could boast.

Their approach, therefore, and the destruction they delivered on the Kingdom were a close approximation of the world ending - ending in that small corner of the globe, that is.

Cities were levelled.

The Temple robbed and burned.

Whole populations displaced and made captive.

And we might, therefore, "borrow" from these things metaphor - illustration - of what Jesus does, in fact, threaten, (in the (four) gospels).

Doom and *gloom* feature in His very preaching.

They aren't just from the imagination of Bible-Belt Bible-thumpers; a device for scaring people into the pews.

Which is why we find Paul this evening saying 'We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be recoiled to God.'

To 'entreat' is to implore; urge; *beg*...

It speaks of urgency;

it implies consequence.

The tone is grave; of life and death.

These matters are black and white.

Our response, therefore, to this "entreaty," mustn't be *grey*.

So though, then, Joel's words might not be, *strictly* speaking, *exactly* the thing to dread, there is something that *is* looming: a dreadful trap.

And why would I step into it - that "trap" - if a solution has already been found?

An escape hatch.

An exit sign:

'[N]ow is the day of salvation!' Paul observes.

Because Jesus has taken my sin.

And I might swap it for His righteousness.

Let us then, this Lent, renew ourselves in this exchange, by the power of the Holy Spirit - *another* gift from a generous God, who desires that 'no one might perish.'