



DATE: Dec. 6 (Second Sunday of Advent)
SCRIPTURE: Joel 2:12-13, 28-29
TITLE: Joel's Peace after locust devastation.

To say that 2020 has been a year full of the unexpected, and most of it bad, is an understatement. Global pandemic, civil rights protests, political turmoil, and the west coast burning were natural and social disasters that have claimed lives and altered our entire culture. One thing most of us may have not even noticed that could be added to the list: a plague of locusts of Biblical scale.

That's right, Eastern Africa suffered a great plague of locusts—the worst on record. The locusts have wreaked havoc on nations like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Most of the time locusts are solitary, harmless crea-

tures who pose little threat to anything. When conditions are just right though, their population can grow. When density reaches a certain point, the locusts can literally transform. They change color, grow larger, and become extremely social, reproductive, and voracious. Swarms can reach populations over 10 billion, stretch over hundreds of square kilometers, and travel 200 km in a day ravaging farms in their wake.

An average swarm can destroy as much crops as 2,500 people consume in a year. These swarms devastate nations, cripple communities, and send thousands into deep debt and poverty. The prophet Joel is operating in the wake of one such plague of locusts.

Then, like today, the people most hurt by locusts are the poor. Then, like today, plagues of locusts have natural causes but the disaster can be worsened by social frameworks. Then, like today, swarming locusts can destabilize governments, bring social and political unrest, and create a more violent society. Then, like today, plagues of locusts can leave people wondering about the role of God in their world.



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Joel speaks in the midst of this devastation a word of peace. He brings a promise of peace and restoration—not only to the people, but to the whole of creation. Yet first he reminds the people to come to God with their whole, sincere hearts. Joel acknowledges

the devastation and invites people to come to God “with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow.” Like Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount, those who mourn will be comforted.

This is a word of we can hear today. We are a broken-hearted people. We have spent our days fasting from many of the comforts of life. We have spent long nights weeping. We have known sorrow for nine months of isolation, fear, and anxiety. These things are not punishment for our unfaithfulness. These are the natural, understandable, and human responses to a disaster that is both natural and social.

We are hurting, but we know that God is with us through it all. The Spirit can move—even through the devastation of a swarm of locusts; and even in the midst of the plague of COVID-19. The Spirit will come to the young and old, rich and poor, men and women. It gives us a chance to dream of a future. It gives us a chance to have visions of how the world can be. How is the Spirit moving in you?

What are your dreams of what the future can hold, even after this devastation? What is your vision of what our church can be? God is pouring out the Holy Spirit on us all, even through the weeping and sorrow.