

OPENING REFLECTION

Pr. Chris deForest, NEPA Synod Assembly, June 2, 2017

Joel 2:28-32

A reading from the word of the Lord that came to the prophet Joel, from the 2nd chapter:

²⁸ Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. ³⁰ I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³² Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape (as the LORD has said) and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

L: Word of God, word of Life

A: Thanks be to God.

I am confused. Are we in the afterward, or the before? Did we just hear a word of gladness, or gloom? Festival or fear? How much has happened already, and what will transpire? Will we escape? Expand? Explore? Expire? Do we survive? What can we save? Are we to call out, or wait to be called? Wait and watch, watch and worry, scurry and scour, scrimp and save, for what? A rainy day of darkness? For bloody moons, and sons who do not rise to take our place? Is it our job to delight in or dread, this coming of portents, this pouring out, of prophets?

Prophets? Profits? How is that spelled? Our liquidity is dry. Our mission seems decommissioned. Our flesh feels flabby and festered. Some fires we have set, have burned our bridges, and people can see those columns of smoke. We are too old. Too small. Too few. Too many. Too monochromatic. And melodramatic. And meanwhile our halls need overhauling but appalling loss is dross that's dragging us down. And the town and the country – do they really need us? Would they ever heed us? It's not like before. And the afterward, scares us. Dares us. So unprepares us.

Lord, repair us. Ensnare us. Bind us to the beam of the boat, and let the waves break over us. Wash out our eyes, our ears, our mouths: to speak, to hear, to see – your word, your works, your wonders. You are the captain. You made the ship, and the sea. You are the living water. Poured out like fire. Like blood. Lord, bring your flood. And whatever flounders, whatever drowns, whatever bleeds out or goes up in smoke – who is at the helm? Who has already been lashed to the mast? Leashed to a cross to unleash us from loss, and wrong?

From before to the after, from keel to the rafter, stem to stern and amidst all concerns, let us trust, that we are not captain. We are also not crew. We are not passengers or stow-aways, cast-aways to leave behind, or ballast to throw away. We are the boards and the beams. And Christ our boatwright and master, is always building and binding us, steering and steadying us, dashing and splashing us in the waters of our baptisms, his Spirit to pour over us. He pours all his love and life, on all of us, all flesh, leashing us all together, with ties that bind even the most battered boards, and greenest branches, leashing us together into a vessel of his own vision and design, to be unleashed to sail on seas fair and foul, charted and uncharted, on his voyage to save and serve a world that's drowning in darkness and despair.

Do you know what happened to most of the boats that brought our forebears to this land? You may think they all sank at sea in terrible storms. Or that they sat in dingy docks for decades, forgotten, until they rotted or burned down. But that's not how it went down. Most of those ships, when their seafaring days were done, were brought on shore, and their boards were used to build homes, and barns, and new schools and stores, and yes – to build churches. May it be so, for each of us, for all of us. O God, let us not pine for, accept, or expect only smooth sailing – but only faith in your sure steering. Let your Spirit be wind in our sails, fire in our furnace, water to float and flow us. And when we reach those great and terrible days, let us let you remake us, transform us, to new shape, new purpose, sounding new depths – always pouring out your Spirit on all flesh in such a flood that lifts us and washes us on to the river of life, and that far shore – unleashed by your unfathomed love and bottomless grace, to become the flagship of your fleet, ready to hail the hearty, bountiful “welcome aboard” to all who are lost and drifting. Amen.