

# Like always, God Will Pour Out The Spirit. Just be Sure You Get Soaked!

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FCMF #1

## Scripture

Selections from Joel 2 NRSV

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near... Fire devours in front of them... like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble... Truly the day of the Lord is great; terrible indeed—who can endure it? Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me... rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for God is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love... In response to his people the Lord said: I am sending you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied... Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things! Do not fear, you animals of the field, for the pastures are green... O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God... for God has poured down for you abundant rain... The threshing floors shall be full of grain... I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper and the cutter, my great army, which I sent... You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied... You shall know that I am in the midst... 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. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”

## Sermon

It was almost time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple precincts he came upon people selling oxen and sheep and doves, and bankers were doing business there too. He made a whip out of rope and drove them all out of the temple area, sheep, oxen and all; then he knocked over the bankers' tables, and set their coins flying. And to the dove merchants he said, "Get these birds out of here!

Just as you can count on the seasons changing,  
and just as with the fall comes the turning of leaves,  
so comes our FCMF pledge season.

You might then, be wondering just how Joel chapter 2  
exactly fits into the kick off for this season?

Well a couple of things come to mind;  
perhaps a paraphrase of Joel's words is my intent?

“Let all the members of FCMF tremble,  
for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near...  
Fire devours in front of them...  
Truly the day of the Lord is great;

terrible indeed—who can endure it?  
Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me...  
Return to the Lord, your pledges,  
for the Lord is gracious and merciful  
and abounding in steadfast love for all  
who fill out their pledge forms in a timely manner!”

Hmm... perhaps, or maybe I’m thinking more about those tensions  
that have always existed in human communities between abundance  
and scarcity, and between generosity and selfishness.

First, I find it very interesting that even though the 2nd chapter of Joel  
ends on a soaring note of God’s wondrous and generous provision  
it begins on a much more sobering note of gloom and doom.

The coming day of the Lord is actually an awful, dreadful thing,  
an event we should fear rather than be excited about,  
a day that we should be hoping to avoid rather than anticipate.

A brutal and devouring army is on the march,  
like a raging fire that no one and nothing will survive!

Scary stuff, which I guess is appropriate considering  
this is the Sunday before Halloween!  
And certainly we have plenty to be afraid of in our world,  
global warming, terrorist attacks, gun violence,  
runaway health care costs, economic collapse and even some  
of those ancient fears like draught and the plague.

But Joel’s poetry, beautifully swings between these tensions  
in what would have likely been the very real seasonal extremes  
of want and prosperity, that was no doubt common  
in the rural agrarian existence of his times.

For you see the majority of folks in his society were small farmers  
or farm laborers, so he could grab their attention  
with the very real fears of devouring fires and/or locusts  
that did actually destroy everything the land could produce.  
Those most dependent upon the land know all too painfully well  
that their existence is tenable and beyond their ultimate control,  
swinging between seasons and years of want and prosperity.

Now there is a certain routine to the rural life of farmers.  
First the soil must be prepared for planting  
before any seed can be sowed.

Then after the seed sprouts there is usually some weeding  
and some kind of pest control until the harvest finally comes.

And after the harvest, well, the cycle begins again.

But in between each of these steps there is the waiting.  
Farmers have to be patient, they have to be persons of hope  
and probably a bit religious since you have lots of time to pray.

For you see, a lot can happen from planting to harvest to ruin everything.

Sometimes it's not enough rain, other times too much,  
and some years the rain just comes at the wrong time.  
Some years an early freeze in the fall,  
while in other years its a late freeze in the spring that takes the crop.  
And then some years the crop can be demolished at any point  
not only once but twice and three times  
by any number of critters or diseases.  
And so in the end, much as the bad stuff,  
as well as the good is simply out of the planter's control.

So the visions, like the ones Joel speaks of, of full threshing floors  
and overflowing vats of wine are necessary each and every year,  
just to keep the cycles and routines of rural life going.

But, in those years when the harvest is scarce,  
or perhaps non-existent, the hope that those visions create  
become even more crucial to one's survival.

And so, I do think that there are some similarities  
then to our annual budget and pledge process here at FCMF?

Throughout the year each of us tends the soil  
prepping it through our daily acts of faithfulness,  
waiting for the Elders plant a budget in our midst.  
Then we wait again, in prayer, patiently, for the pledges,  
like those proverbial sheaves, to come in.

All year long go ahead and pay the mortgage  
and the electric bills and my salary.

But the nice thing about following God as a church community  
is that we need not wait for only one season of harvest.

In fact you might say that God wants us to be continually planting seeds  
and therefore to being continually surprised by unexpected harvests.

We meet regularly to worship together.  
We plan services with the hope and expectation that not only  
will we have a warm sanctuary 'cause we paid the gas bill,  
but with the expectation that you all will come each Sunday

desiring to worship God with all your heart, mind and soul.

We also plant, with the hope that some new folks  
will stumble through our doors  
and find a place that is inviting, friendly and safe.

We also hold to the vision that newer folks will step into  
new opportunities and tasks, when others need to step away,  
and offer their gifts of music, service and prayer.

Each week we seek to share both our joys and our sorrows,  
to laugh as well as cry together, as we  
support and challenge one another.

We also spend the year reaching out, beyond ourselves  
to serve not only our local community but parts all over the world.  
Just this past year we have encountered such diverse places as,  
Ghana, Peru, Paraguay, Benin, Bulgaria and Bolivia, to name a few.

Four years ago, we and eight other congregations  
decided to open our doors to homeless families.  
And Faith Family Hospitality was born, without any money or staff  
or with any certainty that they could cover the expenses!

And now those few seeds have yielded 27 congregations  
who help to house and feed families in desperate need!

But that was not all, with a little prodding  
and much openness from FCMF, these communities of faith  
planted the seed that is now the FFH day center.

Again we here at FCMF probably entered this a bit naive  
not knowing how all of it would work out or be paid for?

And yet six days a week we are collecting a harvest knowing that families,  
moms, dads, kids (from birth to teenagers) as well as grandparents,  
have a safe, warm and clean place to go to.

A welcoming place where they can find rest, community  
and help navigating an often confusing  
and sometimes hostile public services network.

A place that is cool in the summer and warm in the winter.  
A place where they can do laundry, take a shower  
and make a warm bowl of soup or mac n cheese.  
A dry space out of the rain, as well as a quiet place  
where a mother can nurse her newborn in private  
or let her cry without a librarian asking her to leave.

Not only do we have something to do with that harvest,  
every Friday evening we can enjoy the fruit of  
30 to 40 folks coming into our building,  
finding again a safe and inviting place for a good meal, showers  
and more importantly a space and time to organize their own efforts  
to plant seeds of justice here in Ft Collins for the homeless!

But some of us who have been here a while  
have known times of scarcity as well.

There have been some hard years here at good ole FCMF.  
Not too long ago the uncertainty of our future together  
likely lead to some fear and anxiety as we wondered  
if we would have enough funds and folks to keep it all going.

Both were a bit depleted and the landscape going forward  
certainly looked a bit bleak and discouraging.

But we continued, just as we continue today  
and as we must always continue, moving forward,  
preparing and waiting and then preparing again.

Preparing for a future harvest by always remaining open,  
open with a sense of both gratitude and expectation  
that the spirit of God will once again be poured out upon us.

We can do this, we can have faith in our future with God  
because of what we have experienced with God in our past!

The Lord is indeed in our midst and the Spirit of God  
is being poured out upon us all in new and dynamic ways!

But we should never forget that the gifts of the Spirit originate  
in the overflowing love and generosity of our God.

And as boring as budgets may seem, they are,  
as I have stated before, statements of our faith.  
They are in the end examples of a creative  
and radical faith in the generosity of God.

Do our budgets encourage us to dream new dreams?  
Are our visions continuing to expand in hopefulness  
or are we more concerned or constrained by what we fear?

And how, in the end, will our budget and pledges empower us  
to serve and be prophetic in our world both near and far?"

God's Spirit is poured out upon us all  
and God's spirit is also willing to wash away anything  
that seeks to keep our gifts buried deep within us.

Do not then, my sisters and brothers, be surprised  
at God's generosity or of the Spirit's unexpected and timely arrival.

Our God, has and will continue to take care of us,  
pouring out upon us those things that we need.

All that we need, most of the time, is to remain open,  
open to God's great love for us, sufficient in the knowledge  
and with the hope, that with the Spirit's courage and power,  
we will be enabled to carry this love of God into our world.  
Receiving it and carrying it with joyful praise  
and with the hope-filled expectation of a fruitful harvest!

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