



LENT 2021

ZOOM Bible Study

SERIES INTRODUCTION

“Return to the Lord your God,” the congregation sings before the Gospel reading to mark the season of Lent. This particular Lenten season, we will focus on God’s historic call to His people to repent and the things that might get in the way of us returning to God. Even if our desire is to return to God, there are many stumbling blocks, not the least of which is ourselves. That is the subject of our Lenten theme this year as we dive into God’s Holy Word and consider carefully the distinct difficulty experienced by the people we encounter in each biblical narrative.

We will also explore in each study how that particular difficulty might be keeping us from returning to God or, equally important, how God may be using that very difficulty to draw us to Him. Whatever the case may be, it is always God’s desire to be our God and for us to be His people (Jeremiah 31:33).

In many ways, this is a very timely study after the whole world experienced a time of plague and social distancing last year during Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and beyond. That holy season was unlike anything we had ever experienced. It was a time when God, during the season of Lent, was clearly calling to us and saying once again, “Return to the Lord your God.” Throughout the Scriptures, God has time and time again called His people Israel back to Him.

It will be interesting, and perhaps also challenging, for us to look back at the COVID-19 outbreak and see ourselves in the place of the biblical people we will be studying. How did we handle things when we didn’t really understand what was going on? Did the event itself, and the challenges and complications it presented in our lives, cause us to draw further away from God or to “return to the Lord our God”?

We will explore and try to answer these questions and many others through these sessions: A Call to Return; Prayer; Betrayal; False Witness; Denial; The Kingdom of God; and The Resurrection and You: Come and See. As we do, we remember in faith to “return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13).

ASH WEDNESDAY: STUDENT

A Call to Return

JOEL 1:1–20; 2:11–17

OPENING

Each lesson will begin with a reading of Joel 2:13 and a prayer specific to the theme of the study for that week, keeping with the theme, “Return to the Lord.”

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, You desire to draw Your people back to You through repentance. Help us to acknowledge our sinfulness in thought, word, and deed; what we have done and what we have left undone. In faith, let us see the love that You have for us all in the sending of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Savior from sin. Lead us by Your Spirit to desire to know and do Your will, to walk in Your ways that You may be glorified. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Reading

Joel 1

¹The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

²Hear this, you elders;
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your fathers?

³Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children to another generation.

⁴What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

⁵Awake, you drunkards, and weep,
and wail, all you drinkers of wine,
because of the sweet wine,
for it is cut off from your mouth.

⁶For a nation has come up against my land,
powerful and beyond number;
its teeth are lions’ teeth,
and it has the fangs of a lioness.

⁷It has laid waste my vine
and splintered my fig tree;

it has stripped off their bark and thrown it
down;

their branches are made white.

⁸Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth
for the bridegroom of her youth.

⁹The grain offering and the drink offering
are cut off
from the house of the LORD.

The priests mourn,
the ministers of the LORD.

¹⁰The fields are destroyed,
the ground mourns,
because the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil languishes.

¹¹Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil;
wail, O vinedressers,
for the wheat and the barley,
because the harvest of the field has perished.

¹²The vine dries up;
the fig tree languishes.
Pomegranate, palm, and apple,
all the trees of the field are dried up,
and gladness dries up
from the children of man.

¹³Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;
wail, O ministers of the altar.
Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,
O ministers of my God!
Because grain offering and drink offering
are withheld from the house of your God.
¹⁴Consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders
and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.
¹⁵Alas for the day!
For the day of the LORD is near,
and as destruction from the Almighty it
comes.
¹⁶Is not the food cut off
before our eyes,
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?
¹⁷The seed shrivels under the clods;
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down
because the grain has dried up.
¹⁸How the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep suffer.
¹⁹To you, O LORD, I call.
For fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness,
and flame has burned
all the trees of the field.
²⁰Even the beasts of the field pant for you
because the water brooks are dried up,
and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.

Reading

Joel 2:11–17

¹¹The LORD utters his voice
before his army,
for his camp is exceedingly great;
he who executes his word is powerful.
For the day of the LORD is great and very
awesome;
who can endure it?
¹²“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with
mourning;
¹³and rend your hearts and not your
garments.”
Return to the LORD, your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast
love;
and he relents over disaster.
¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and
relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the LORD your God?
¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
¹⁶gather the people.
Consecrate the congregation;
assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her chamber.
¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD,
weep
and say, “Spare your people, O LORD,
and make not your heritage a reproach,
a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
‘Where is their God?’”

INTRODUCTION

A plague of locusts. No, this is not Egypt during the time of Moses, though it may very well bring those days to mind in God's people. God spoke to His people through the prophet Joel to bring the people to repentance and return to their loving heavenly Father. Read Joel 1:2–5.

God spoke to His people in a way that would remind them of the character of the God they love and serve. He spoke to them as the One who wanted to be their God and they His covenant people. The almighty and merciful Lord says to them (and to us): “Return to the LORD your God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13).

QUESTIONS

Q1. What was going on in Joel's time that led God to speak to His people through this prophet? It will be helpful to read through Joel 1 again. In addition, how then does God speak to this situation? How does that compare with the way we express repentance now? What is the “day of the LORD,” and how is it described (1:11)?

Q2. In the present, what is the Lord asking the people to do? Do these words have any application in our lives today?

Q3. In Joel 2:14, the prophet seems ambiguous but hopeful that God may relent of the destruction. Is God a God of destruction? Is God a God of blessing? Would it be wise for us to consider that He could be both? What kind of blessing is Joel expecting?

Q4. How were the people asked to prepare for worship? See Joel 2:15–17. How do you prepare for worship?

CONCLUSION

Like the locust plague that the people in Joel's time experienced, COVID-19 threatened our lives last year during Lent. This virus sent a scare into the world, which threatened our lives and our livelihoods. Did we make connections to this passage (2:13)? Were you able to hear God calling you to return to Him? Did you heed that call?

In the end, God showed His mercy to His people by sending grain, wine, and olive oil. God promised, “You will be satisfied” (2:19). God also assured His people that He would no longer make them a reproach among the other nations.

CLOSING

Prayer: Almighty God, lead us to repentance of all our sins of thought, word, and deed; what we have done and what we have left undone. You have blessed us by the sending of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Help us always to hear You calling us back to return to You in faith toward You, love toward one another, and obedience to Your holy will for our new lives in Christ Jesus. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

MIDWEEK LENT 1: STUDENT

Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane: Prayer

MATTHEW 26:36–44

OPENING

Read Joel 2:13 together.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, You have taught Your disciples and us how to pray in faith. Help us in all times and in any circumstances to turn to our Father in prayer as You have always done. Grant that we submit to the Father's will in what we think, say, and do, that all glory may be given to our triune God alone. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Reading *Matthew 26:36–44*

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." ³⁷And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." ³⁹And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." ⁴⁰And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? ⁴¹Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." ⁴²Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." ⁴³And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again.

INTRODUCTION

Communication . . . the lifeblood of all relationships. The Lord God has always desired a relationship with those whom He has created. He has blessed us with different ways of communicating with one another. And He has given us the blessing of being able to communicate with Him, man to God, child to Father, along with the certainty that He is listening. In this study, we will look specifically at the importance of prayer, using Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane as our point of reference; we will also look at the relationship that He has with the Father.

QUESTIONS

Q1. What was the point of taking Peter, James, and John farther into the garden with Him? What was Jesus sorrowful and troubled about, specifically?

Q2. First, what is God's *ultimate* will for all people as His creation? Second, what is God's will for Jesus Christ, His only Son?

Q3. What does Jesus say to the three men? How are we to understand the word *watch* in this context? Is this related to any instructions that Jesus has given for us to follow?

Q4. The prayer is the same. Three times the Son addresses the Father, asking God to take the cup (of suffering/of sin/of death) away from Him. Three times He prays, "Not My will, but Yours be done." What are we to learn from *how* and *what* Jesus prays?

CONCLUSION

The events of the Gethsemane narrative are full of unexpected human physical manifestations—the drops of bloody sweat, the disciples falling asleep repeatedly, and Jesus being sorrowful to the point of death. We are seeing a fully human Jesus showing the weakness of humanity but remaining without sin. We also witness Him showing a strength that we do not have in and of ourselves, but in Him we have the same Spirit that cries, "Abba, Father." And in the end, we truly learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

OPTIONAL: SING STANZA 1 OF "GO TO DARK GETHSEMANE" (*LSB* 436).

CLOSING

Catechesis: Read the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning.

Pray: The Lord's Prayer

MIDWEEK LENT 2: STUDENT

Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane: Betrayal

READ MATTHEW 26:14–25, 44–56

OPENING

Read Joel 2:13 together.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Gracious Lord, as part of Your suffering, You knew that one of Your own, Judas Iscariot, would betray You into the hands of sinners, bringing the hour of Your suffering and our salvation to fulfillment of the Father's will. You have shown us the Father's love in that while we were still sinners, You died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Create in us clean hearts and renew a right spirit within us. Draw us ever closer to You that we may dwell in Your presence the remainder of our days and unto eternal life with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Judas . . . the name has become synonymous with *betrayal*. Jesus, who had chosen Judas as one of the twelve disciples, referred to Judas as “a devil” (John 6:70–71). In His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus called Judas “the son of perdition” (John 17:12 KJV). Though Judas, when he saw that Jesus was condemned to die, felt remorse, it still had been said of him by Jesus, “The Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24).

Reading *Matthew 26:14–25, 44–56*

¹⁴Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

¹⁷Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

²⁰When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” ²²And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” ²³He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” ²⁵Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

⁴⁴So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. ⁴⁵Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.”

⁴⁷While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. ⁴⁸Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” ⁴⁹And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. ⁵¹And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. ⁵²Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” ⁵⁵At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled.

QUESTIONS

Q1. What is betrayal? Why is it such a damaging sin?

Q2. In what way did Judas’s betrayal come about? How did Judas plan his handing over of Jesus? Imagine you are a reporter. How would you answer the usual questions: the who, what, when, where, why, and how of Judas’s betrayal of Jesus?

Q3. The night that Jesus was betrayed was not the only time the Mount of Olives (or Olivet) was mentioned during Jesus’ life and ministry. What events took place on the Mount of Olives besides Jesus’ betrayal by Judas?

Q4. Why did Jesus come forward toward Judas and the officers bearing lanterns and torches and weapons (John 18:3–6)? Why did Jesus ask the question, “Whom do you seek?” What is the reaction and posture of the officers when Jesus says, “I am He”?

CONCLUSION

Much is made in the four Gospel accounts about Judas. More is written of him by Luke in Acts 1. Betrayal is one of the more sinister acts that a human being can perpetrate because it involves intentionally breaking the trust of someone close to gain something. The account of Jesus being betrayed by Judas is evocative of Joseph being betrayed by his brothers in Genesis 37 and, after everything, how Joseph responds to them. The words “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20) have a Christological component, which looks forward to Judas’s evil deed of greed and Jesus dying to win salvation for all.

CLOSING

OPTIONAL: SING STANZAS 1–2 OF “ALAS! AND DID MY SAVIOR BLEED” (*LSB* 437).

Pray: The Lord’s Prayer

MIDWEEK LENT 3: STUDENT

Caiaphas and the Council: False Witness

MATTHEW 26:57–68

OPENING

Read Joel 2:13 together.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Precious Savior, as You endured that mockery of a trial, with slander and conjecture and false accusations being thrown at You as You were struck and spat upon, You have shown us how to turn the other cheek. Help us learn to do the same when others revile us and say all kinds of false things about us, that our own words and actions may not be in vengeance toward others but may show others the love that You have for all of us through patience and forgiveness and mercy. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Blasphemy . . . just one of the things the chief priests and teachers of the law were trying to catch Jesus doing that they may put Him to death. *Blasphemy* is words or actions that show disrespect for God. Sometimes people can become so blinded with hatred, as did the religious leaders in Jerusalem toward Jesus, that it is effortless to break the Eighth Commandment. Then as they attempt to justify their words and actions, they often magnify the blasphemy, resulting in serious damage or complete ruin of another’s reputation. This is part of the scene of Jesus’ “trial” before Caiaphas, the high priest, and other temple leaders.

Reading

Matthew 26:57–68

⁵⁷Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. ⁵⁸And Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, ⁶⁰but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward ⁶¹and said, “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’” ⁶²And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” ⁶³But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. ⁶⁶What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” ⁶⁷Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, ⁶⁸saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?”

QUESTIONS

Q1. What charges are the chief priests seeking to levy against Jesus (Matthew 26:59)?

Q2. Of the false witnesses whose words are recorded in Scripture, two gave testimony against Jesus. What did they say? Read Matthew 26:61.

Q3. The high priest stood and asked Jesus for a response. How does Jesus fulfill what was written about Him? Read Isaiah 53:7.

Q4. This connects well to the question that Jesus had asked His disciples earlier and the confession that Peter had given. What was that answer? Read Matthew 16:16.

Q5. How does Jesus answer the high priest’s question? What is ironic about Caiaphas’s inquiry?

CONCLUSION

It is jarring to us that the sinless Son of God is being tried for crimes He did not commit. What great lengths people will go to when they want to wrongfully convict someone in the court of public opinion! Jesus’ life and ministry were without sin, but He is falsely accused of the sin of blasphemy, and a sentence of death is called for by the people.

CLOSING

OPTIONAL: SING STANZA 5 OF “O DEAREST JESUS, WHAT LAW HAST THOU BROKEN” (*LSB* 439).

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, it is with great sorrow that we look upon Your sham of a trial and hear the false witnessing against You who were without sin. Help us when we are haunted by false testimony against us, and remind us what You endured for our sake. Give to us strength, courage, and faith when our enemies say all kinds of false things against us on account of You, knowing that we are blessed by You, who truly are the Christ, the Son of the living God. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, may we confess this always, but with faith and love, firmly believing and holding on to this saving faith in You, even unto death. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

MIDWEEK LENT 4: STUDENT

Peter in the Courtyard: Denial

LUKE 22:31–34, 54–62

OPENING

Read Joel 2:13 together.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Merciful Lord, on the night when You were betrayed in the Upper Room, You foretold that all the disciples would leave You, in fulfillment of Scripture. When Peter assured You that he would follow You to prison and even death, You met his words with the astonishing truth that he would instead deny You three times that very night. Fill us with steadfast faith and courageous confession in the midst of all the dangers and troubles that threaten the faith of our hearts and the confession of our mouths that You will confess us to Your Father in heaven on the Last Day. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

Reading *Luke 22:31–34, 54–62*

³¹“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ³²but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” ³³Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” ³⁴Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

⁵⁴Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. ⁵⁵And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. ⁵⁶Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, “This man also was with him.” ⁵⁷But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” ⁵⁸And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.” ⁵⁹And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” ⁶⁰But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.

INTRODUCTION

The wording of our text (Luke 22:54–62) shows us how passive Jesus is now, allowing Himself to be arrested and led away. The frightened Peter follows just far enough behind so as to not be noticed and risk being captured also. He loves the Lord Jesus but perhaps a little less than he loves himself. In these verses, we are reminded of the meaning of the First Commandment: “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Peter’s boastful words in the Upper Room (Luke 22:31–34) were a bit hasty as now he begins fearing something more than God, loving something more than Jesus, and trusting something other than God’s promises and Jesus’ teachings.

QUESTIONS

Q1. In Luke 22:31–32, why does Jesus repeat Peter’s (Simon’s) name? What does Satan want with Peter? What does Jesus mean by “strengthen your brothers”?

Q2. In what way was Peter “following” Jesus in verse 54?

Q3. Who was the first one to recognize Peter? What did this person say about him?

Q4. How did Peter respond the second time he was recognized?

Q5. The third time came about an hour later—perhaps time enough for Peter to cool down, unless, of course, he was pondering the first two unwelcome accusations during that hour. What did the third person insistently say?

What was Peter’s response this time?

Since time is important in this pericope, what happens next?

CONCLUSION

Things happen very quickly now. While Jesus is questioned by Caiaphas, Peter is questioned in the courtyard by those who recognize him by the light of the fire. Jesus' words to Peter earlier that night in the Upper Room are being fulfilled. Peter had said he was ready to go to prison and even death with Jesus. But fear can get the best of even loyal men. The one who was so boastful before now shouts in anger at those accusing him of knowing Jesus. With the third denial of his Lord, Peter hears the cock crow. One disappointed look from Jesus jogs Peter's memory, and he comes undone—running away in tears of shame.

CLOSING

OPTIONAL: SING STANZA 1 OF "JESUS REFUGE OF THE WEARY" (*LSB* 423).

Pray: The Lord's Prayer

MIDWEEK LENT 5: STUDENT

Pilate at His Headquarters: The Kingdom of God

JOHN 18:12–14, 28–38

OPENING

Read Joel 2:13 together.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Jesus, You are King of kings and Lord of lords. With the Father and the Holy Spirit You have dominion and power over all things. Though You humbled Yourself to become one of us, You were no earthly king, as Your kingdom was not of this world. Thank You that Your life, death, and resurrection have set us free from sin by faith in You and Your promises. Amen.

Reading *John 18:12–14, 28–38*

¹²So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

²⁸Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters, so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover. ²⁹So Pilate went outside to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" ³⁰They answered him, "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you." ³¹Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law." The Jews said to him, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death." ³²This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

³³So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” ³⁵Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” ³⁷Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸Pilate said to him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, “I find no guilt in him.

INTRODUCTION

Read Psalm 24, paying special attention to verses 7–10.

¹The earth is the LORD’s and the full- | ness thereof,*
the world and those who | dwell therein,
²for he has founded it up- | on the seas*
and established it upon the | rivers.

³Who shall ascend the hill | of the LORD?*

And who shall stand in his | holy place?

⁴He who has clean hands and a | pure heart,*
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear de- | ceitfully.

⁵He will receive blessing | from the LORD*
and righteousness from the God of his sal- | vation.

⁶Such is the generation of those who | seek him,*
who seek the face of the God of | Jacob.

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O | ancient doors,*
that the King of glory | may come in.

⁸Who is this King of | glory?*

The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in | battle!

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O | ancient doors,*
that the King of glory | may come in.

¹⁰Who is this King of | glory?*

The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of | glory!

The Israelites in the time of Samuel rejected the Lord as their King and sought an earthly king to rule over them like the other nations had. God obliged and gave them earthly kings, for they had long rejected God, His will for His people, and His ways. But this would not thwart God’s plan for our salvation. As we sing in the season of Advent: “The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here. Life and salvation He doth bring” (*LSB* 341:1). This King would be like no other king God’s people had ever known or that the world would ever know after Him.

Zechariah prophesied about Jesus: “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). Before this was fulfilled, John the Baptizer, the forerunner of Christ, would preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2).

QUESTIONS

Q1. Read John 18:28. The Jews brought Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to Pilate’s house. Why did they not enter Pilate’s house with Jesus?

Q2. Read John 18:29–30. Pilate demands to know the accusation the Jews were bringing against Jesus. What is their answer to Pilate? Do they give a specific charge?

Q3. What was the real reason given for bringing Jesus to Pilate? What did this fulfill?

Q4. Pilate faced a big dilemma with this situation. His options were limited. His actions seem only to be stalling the inevitable. He returns to speak some more to Jesus. Read John 18:33.

Reading *John 18:33*

³³So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

What does Pilate ask Jesus this time? What insight does this give us about Pilate’s grasp of the situation?

Q5. Read John 18:34–35. What is the two-part response that Jesus gives Pilate instead of a straight answer?

Why does Jesus give His answer to Pilate in this way? What is Pilate’s response to Jesus’ question?

Q6. Still stuck in worldly-mindedness, Pilate has his “aha” moment and asks Jesus, “So, You are a king?” (John 18:37).

Jesus answers by saying that for this purpose He came into the world. What is the purpose for which Jesus came?

CONCLUSION

Jesus states that He has come to “bear witness to the truth,” and that those who are “of the truth” listen to Him. (See also John 10:25–28.) Having grown weary of listening to Jesus talk in such a mysterious way, Pilate dismisses Jesus’ silly notions—as he sees them—with the words “What is truth?” (John 18:38). The world still dismisses Jesus with this very question. Read John 1:9–13.

CLOSING

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as the world continues to reject You and dismiss the truth of Your Word, help us, we pray, in the midst of that rejection, to hear the truth with ears and hearts of faith that cling to You as our King of kings. Bless us with perseverance and strength as we face the days ahead until You come again in glory. In Your name we pray. Amen.

EASTER SUNDAY: STUDENT

The Resurrection and You: Come and See

MATTHEW 28:1–10

OPENING

Read Joel 2:13 together.

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

Prayer: Father in heaven, You called Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, out of death and the grave and raised Him back to life, thus showing that His sacrifice for the sins of the world was acceptable to You. As we gather together to celebrate with joy His glorious resurrection, lead us always to know that we live by faith and not by sight. Help us always to believe in the promises that the empty tomb assures us of, namely the resurrection of our own bodies and life everlasting with You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

L: He is risen!

C: **He is risen indeed!**

All: **Alleluia!**

Reading *Matthew 28:1–10*

¹Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ²And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. ⁴And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. ⁵But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. ⁶He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you.” ⁸So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹And behold, Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

INTRODUCTION

When they woke that first Easter morning, little did anybody know that everything had changed for those who would believe in Jesus. However, Jesus had been saying this to His disciples for some time. “From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, *and on the third day be raised*” (Matthew 16:2; emphasis added).

It can be very difficult while experiencing grief and loss to remember those things God's Word tells us that can bring us peace and hope in the midst of sorrow. Yet, as those who are called to believe in Jesus, we are called to believe not only that Jesus suffered and died on a cross but also that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus' resurrection brings that peace and hope to all who believe. On this day, we celebrate the Lord's resurrection. Each and every day is Easter to us because we have been called to faith in Him who was raised. As Jesus told His disciples, "Because I live, you also will live" (John 14:19). For this reason, you are invited this morning, with the same invitation given to the women at the tomb by God's messenger—the angel sitting on top of the stone—to "come and see."

QUESTIONS

Q1. "Seeing is believing," or so the saying goes. Is this true?

Q2. What were the women who came to the tomb that morning going there to do? What did they expect to see? Read Mark 16:1–2; Luke 24:1. In detail, give a description of what they actually saw.

Q3. Why do you think the guards "trembled and became like dead men"? What was the women's response? What was the disciples' response to the women?

CONCLUSION

When they awoke that Easter morning, the women did not expect to see the things that they encountered. They probably expected to go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' lifeless body and to wipe away many tears of sorrow and loss. Instead, they experienced a myriad of emotions when they stumbled upon an angel from heaven, a rolled-away stone, two catatonic guards, and no *body* in the tomb. Such words of comfort and joy the angel said to the women that morning: "He is not here, He is risen, just as He said." And still today, over two thousand years later, we echo that Good News, that Gospel refrain, "He is risen indeed! Alleluia!"

In a sense, every day for us now is Easter. He lives, and because He lives, we shall live also. Come and see what the Lord has in store for you. Come and see what the Lord has prepared for you. And one day come and see Him as He is for we shall be like Him.

CLOSING

OPTIONAL: SING STANZAS 1, 4, 5 OF “ALLELUIA! JESUS IS RISEN” (*LSB* 474).

Prayer: Loving Father, by the glorious resurrection of Your Son, Jesus, from death and the grave, You have indeed opened to us everlasting life. Allow us, by the ways You have chosen, to “come and see” our risen Lord Jesus through the means of Word and Sacrament, until that day when He returns and we shall see Him as He is in all His glory, and we shall be like Him. In the name of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.