

**Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – August 6, 2017**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**  
*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Joel 3:12-16**

**'Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. 13) Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.** Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow-- so great is their wickedness!' 14) Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. 15) The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. **16) The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.**

In the name of the Lord – our refuge and stronghold – fellow people of God:

Ladies and Gentlemen, Step right up get your tickets for the greatest show on earth. At least in the movies, that's how tickets to the circus are billed and sold. Through the prophet Joel, the Lord calls out to the ladies and gentlemen of the earth calling them to attention and assuring them that The Day of the Lord is Near. This will be a day of destruction for God's enemies and a day of rescue for God's people.

Sometimes it's difficult for us to understand sections of OT prophecy as well as we would like because we're not familiar with some of the OT history, terms and places. That's probably the situation we face in this text when we hear the Lord calling the nations to advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat, the fourth king of Judah was one of the reform Kings of Judah – a king who walked in the ways of the Lord. When he learned that his kingdom was coming under attack from the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites; he turned to the Lord in prayer together with the people of his kingdom. The Lord promised him the he would provide the victory saying, **'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's. ... 17) You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you.** (2 Chronicles 20:15, 17 NIV)

In keeping with the Lord' directions the Jehoshaphat and his armies marched to area of the Desert of Takoa – singing and praising the Lord for his goodness as they went! The Lord caused these enemies to turn against each other. When Jehoshaphat and his men arrived on the scene, the valley was filled with dead bodies. The spoils of victory were left to Jehoshaphat. There was so much plunder it took three days to cart it all away. The place of victory was later named after him.

The people at the time of the prophet Joel would have easily remembered the great victory the Lord provided at the time of Jehoshaphat. In this text, the Lord uses the term Valley of Jehoshaphat in a symbolical way – later he calls it the valley of decision. Just as the Lord once crushed his enemies in a place called the Valley of the Lord's Judgement (that's what Jehoshaphat means) so one day he will judge all people and crush his enemies sending them, body and soul to hell.

**Theme:** The Day of the Lord is Near

1. A Day of Destruction for God's Enemies
2. A Day of Rescue for God's people

It may seem to some that surely this day will never come since so many centuries have passed – but the testimony of Scripture is clear and consistent. There will be a day of accounting and judgment for all people. The Apostle Peter responds to those who question the Lord's delay in calling the nations to the Valley of Judgement.

(2 Peter 3:3-13 NIV) **Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4) They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5) But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6) By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7) By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 8) But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9) The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. 11) Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12) as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13) But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.**

Peter like Joel before him proclaims that the Day of the Lord is near. It will be a day of judgment for God's enemies and a day of rescue for God's people. Joel explains the reason for the destruction of the Lord's enemies. **13) Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow-- so great is their wickedness!**

Just as surely as a farmer harvests the grain when it is ripe, so the Lord will harvest his people from this sinful world. The Scriptures often speak of the Day of the Lord as a harvest. Think of Jesus' parable from our Gospel lesson for today where Jesus explains how the believers will be separated from the unbelievers who live together in this world. Jesus' parable emphasizes the Lord's grace to unbelievers – providing them with their life as time to come to faith. But those who remain in their unbelief will ultimately be crushed like workers stomp grapes as part of the wine making process.

The Apostle John in the book of Revelation uses language similar to Joel's to describe the Day of the Lord. (Revelation 14:15-16 NIV) **Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16) So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.**

Although God's enemies may seem to escape trouble in this life, the judgments of the Valley of Jehoshaphat will prove otherwise. **Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.**

The Lord Jesus explains who these multitudes are. (John 5:28-29 NIV) **"Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29) and come out--those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.**

Awesome signs will announce the Coming of the Day of the Lord. **The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 16) The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble.**

Like so many of the inspired writers of the Bible, Joel mentions supernatural events that will take place on the Day of the Lord. The darkening of the sun and moon and stars will be evidence that the days of this world are over.

Surely, the words of Joel describing the destruction of the Lord's enemies leave us longing to hear God's news of our rescue. We can easily see ourselves among the multitudes, multitudes in the valley of

decision. We don't have to wait for that day to know what the Lord's righteous decision will be. Nor do we need to fear that day – thanks to the grace of God who sent his son to be our Savior and who has called us to faith in him.

(John 3:17-18 NIV) **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.**

The day of the Lord will be a day of rescue for God's people. **But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.** The Lord is a refuge and stronghold because he alone provides safety and security from the assaults of Satan, the power of sin, and the horrors of hell. Jesus provides spiritual safety because he won forgiveness for the sins of all by living the perfect life that all are required to live and by suffering the punishment that all deserve because of their sins. He suffered our hell on the cross – being abandoned by his Father in darkness so that we might find refuge and safety in him.

The Lord is the Christian's refuge and stronghold not only regarding the message of forgiveness but also concerning the dangers and troubles of everyday life. We live in an increasingly violent world where many bizarre and shocking evils have become common place in the news. The Psalmist reminds us that we have a stronghold and a sure defense against all evil. (Psalm 46:1-3 NIV) **God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2) Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (3) though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.**

The Lord will continue to be our refuge and stronghold even on the Last day as the world crumbles and falls apart and as unbelievers experience the wrath of God. That day will be a day of rescue and release for those who believe in the one whom God sent to be the Savior of all as the words of Jesus himself remind us. **Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved but whoever does not believe will be condemned.** (Mark 16:16 NIV)

We have seen once again the certainty of the coming of the Day of the Lord and we have been reminded that this will be a day of Destruction for God's Enemies and a Day of Rescue for God's people. This helps us to understand the urgency of making the most of the days that the Lord has given to us. We will live them in the safety and security the Lord offers us as we go about the work he has given us to do.

The impending coming of the day of the Lord with its destruction and rescue reminds us of the importance of the Lord's church and the work that he has entrusted to it – spreading the Gospel throughout the world.

Concern for our spiritual welfare will lead us to make regular use of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament to strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus.

Concern for the spiritual welfare of others will lead us to reach out to them and to share an urgent message with them. The message is this: God's Son died for the sins of the world and rose again to proclaim his pardon for all. (Acts 17:30-31 NIV) **"...now he commands all people everywhere to repent. (31) For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."**

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May we make the most of the time the Lord has given us by using his Gospel to strengthen our faith and to call others repentance and life. Amen.