

Read: Joel 2:12-19

Repentance is Our First Priority

Joel 2:12-13

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Did you hear the first two words we read from Joel? “Even now.” God just told his people that an army was coming to destroy them because they refused to repent of their sins to him. (*Repent* means to be sorry.) Can you imagine how the people felt after hearing that? “An army is coming to destroy us? We need to fight... or run... or panic!”

Then come those two words, “Even now.” Even while you’re worried about so many things; even as these things are about to happen... even now there is still something else that is important. First, repent. Return.

The way he says it in the Bible is to “fast and weep and mourn” and to “rend (that means to rip) your heart”—all of them are ways to show that a person is sorry for what they did and trust in God to forgive them. When something is really troubling you, do you feel like eating or smiling?

God doesn’t just give a threat: “Repent... or else! Or “You better repent because destruction is coming!” He also gives a promise: “Repent because the LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

See, we repent for two reasons. First, we know that what we do is so rude and nasty to God, it gives him a bad reputation when people see us behaving like that. Sin is never okay and never good. Our sin is bad. So bad, we repent. But second, we also repent because God is gracious and promises to forgive.

When you get in trouble with your parents, if you know that they are going to punish you, you often try your best to hide what you did. If God was only a God who punished us, we would do the same. We would hide from God like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. We would never confess our sins to God. But if you have parents who always forgive you even though there will likely be some consequences, you continue to know they will love you no matter what. That’s why it’s important to tell them the truth no matter what happened because the same is true with God. Our God loves us no matter what, God will never hold our sins against us. Ash Wednesday reminds us why Jesus is so important to us because he suffered our consequences

on the cross. Never be afraid to confess your sins because God is gracious, slow to anger, and filled with love for you.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- Are you sometimes scared to tell the truth? Tell of the last time that happened.
- What makes you brave to tell the truth?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Why do you think people lie or try to cover up what they did?
- Instead of covering up, what does today's devotion encourage us to do?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Too often, emotions like anger or fear get in the way of how we talk to each other. What might help everyone in your family discuss better what is sometimes difficult to say out loud?
- Discuss why it is so important to hear the words "I forgive you" after someone says "I'm sorry."

Closing Prayer:

Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can serve you. Amen. (Psalm 130:1-4)