



Holy Disruption: Ancient Prophets for Modern Times—Joel
 Rev. Dr. Glenda Hollingshead; August 23, 2026
 Isaiah 55:10-13; Joel 2:21-29

We are nearing the end of our sermon series, *Holy Disruption: Ancient Prophets for Modern Times*. Throughout the summer, we have listened to the voices of the Hebrew prophets and imagined what their ancient words might have to say to us today. We have wondered what they might say about the wars and injustices of our world, about greed that appears to know no bounds, and about the harm we continue to inflict upon creation. What wisdom might they have to offer when so much around us feels threatened, depleted, or broken—and how might they still point us toward hope?

This brings us to the prophet Joel, who speaks to a people living through devastation and loss, yet dares to imagine that God can bring new life from what has been broken. Unlike many of the other prophets we've encountered, Joel doesn't warn of impending doom. It's already arrived. Still, Joel points the people toward the power, holiness, and hope that Yahweh provides.

In the three chapters of the Book of Joel, the prophet tells us very little about himself, and the date of his prophecy can only be estimated—sometime after the exile, around 500 BCE. What we do know is that the land has been ravaged by swarms of locusts, and drought has left the earth parched and vulnerable to fire. Famine threatens the people of God, and both wild and domesticated animals struggle to find enough water and food. With the land stripped of its

abundance, Judah looks and feels like a war zone, and all hope seems lost.ⁱ The people are suffering in every way imaginable—even spiritually—for worship has ceased because there is not enough grain or wine to make the daily offerings. While there is plenty of dust and devastation, terror and destruction, there is not enough of what is needed to sustain life.

Imagine for a moment that Peggy Hypes and Sue Swilley are at home, getting ready to make communion bread for the church. They go into the pantry and find no flour. They go to the grocery store and the shelves are empty. No Welch's grape juice to be found—and certainly, no wine. This seems unimaginable to us but, make no mistake, there are places around the world today where people face such profound scarcity that even the ordinary necessities of life are difficult or impossible to find. In Gaza, war and the destruction of homes, farms, and infrastructure have made food and clean water desperately scarce. In Ukraine, the ongoing war has disrupted lives, livelihoods, and access to basic necessities. And in places battered by drought, flooding, and extreme heat, climate change is making food and water harder to come by. Some days, it feels like the whole world is on fire. And increasingly, it feels as if we humans have done so much harm to God's wondrous creation that the earth itself is pushing back.

Joel looks at the devastation around him and perceives it to be a consequence of the people's broken relationship with God. But he also recognizes it as an invitation to repent. Joel 2:12-14 reads:

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. Who 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?

God's ultimate desire is not judgment. God's ultimate desire for God's people is relationship, love, and goodness. It's a change of heart that God is after. And with nothing left to rely upon but God, the people of Judah repent, and in so doing, they begin to rebuild their relationship with God.

Joel offers another word of hope in verses 25 and 26: "I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army that I sent against you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you." Down through the ages, people of faith who have literally lost everything have clung to this passage like a life raft—clung to the promise of God that one day, one day, healing and restoration will return.ⁱⁱ

Throughout this sermon series, we've covered some pretty dark days in the life of God's people. But for the remainder of our time this morning, I want us to focus on the generous nature of God that is also on display. For example, notice Joel's instructions to the soil: "Do not fear, O soil; be

glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!” To the animals of the field: “Do not fear, for the pastures are green; the trees and vines bear abundant fruit.” To the children of God: “Rejoice for Yahweh has poured down early and late rains—so much so—the threshing floors shall be full of grain and there will be wine and oil, overflowing. You shall eat in plenty and you shall be satisfied.”

In addition to a mighty procession returning to Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah imagines the promise of God’s word accomplishing its’ deepest purpose:

For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle, and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

God’s promise is not only to restore Israel, but to restore all of creation—to make it flourish once again. You see, we do not worship a God of scarcity but a God of abundance. And God’s abundance is not something we earn or something we are meant to hoard. It’s a gift that continually pours out into the world. Just as rain and snow fall freely upon the earth, bringing forth seed, growth, and harvest, God’s grace brings new life.

Joel’s promise of restored fields and Isaiah’s vision of creation rejoicing reflect a God who is not stingy. God restores what has been depleted, renews what has been broken, and makes room for all creation to flourish—all creation and all people. We catch a glimpse of this in the words of Joel that we hear repeated by Peter every Pentecost Sunday: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” Peter applies these words from Joel to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on people from all walks of life—man and woman—old and young. The work of spreading the love of Jesus in the world is not meant for a few—scarcity—it is meant for us all—abundance.

I want you to take a moment to reflect on how you go about your days—how you see the world around you and your place in it—how you see your life of faith and your role of being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Are there areas of your life where you are living with a mindset of scarcity? There’s not enough time, not enough resources, not enough energy, not enough hope? (Pause) Now, ask yourself this question: What might change if you focused on God’s abundance instead? (Pause)

Rosemarie Freeney Harding was an African American teacher, social worker, spiritual leader, healer, and an influential figure in the Civil Rights Movement. In her book, *Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering*, she has this to say about scarcity and abundance:

There is no scarcity. There is no shortage. No lack of love, of compassion, of joy in the world. There is enough. There is more than enough. Only fear and greed make us think otherwise. No one need starve. There is enough land and enough food. No one need die of thirst. There is enough water. No one need live without mercy. There is no end to grace. And we are all instruments of grace. The more we give it, the more we share it, the more we use it, the more God makes. There is no scarcity of love. There is plenty. And always more.ⁱⁱⁱ

Harding invites us to remember that God's abundance is all around us—in the love we offer, the healing we extend, the hospitality we practice, and the justice we pursue. God is generous by nature, and God's dream is not a world of scarcity, division, and fear, but a world where there is enough for all of us to flourish. We may not be able to mend or fix everything, but we can gather the remnants. We can receive what God has given us, share it freely, and trust that even our small offerings can become part of God's larger work of making the world whole. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ⁱ Barbara M. Musselman, Commentary on Joel, *The Life with God Bible*.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rosemarie Freeney Harding, *Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism, and Mothering*, 2015

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