

# Calling on the Name

Acts 2:14-21

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ May 28, 2023 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,

in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above

and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Acts 2:14-21, NRSV)

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The first words of our worship are important. They set the tone. For the past 5 weeks the first words were: *He is risen*. Today, it switched to: *The Lord be with you*. Today is Pentecost. One of the last things Jesus said was, “Lo, I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”<sup>1</sup> But he also said you will be reminded of this because I am sending you an incredible gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit that will come upon you.<sup>2</sup> When we say *The Lord be with you*, we are declaring that this is not just any god, but it is Jesus, who died and was raised by the Father. We are declaring that if we call upon this name Jesus, *we have the Holy Spirit*, we have the power of this same Jesus living inside of us. The problem is that by and large, followers of Jesus are not sharing this joy

and freedom with the world! Why not? Pentecost gives us a glimpse into a moment in history when the first followers of Jesus received this power in a memorable way. We have it too!

This morning, we’re invited into a picture of what it might look like if followers of Jesus in 2023 understood that we have been rescued – or “saved” as the last verse of our Scripture this morning says. But to understand that we are saved – to come on Sunday morning to declare that – we also have to know what we have been saved *from*. This is the missing piece of the gospel story that we’ve covered with layers of cultural dirt. Time for some excavating to try and recover what Peter was saying here in this sermon. This is, by the way, the first *Christian* sermon recorded in Scripture. Before this, there were followers of Jesus waiting to see what was next. But at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them, they were a church, Christ’s body to share Jesus with?...

Who?

Everyone.

Check out our last verse this morning. *Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. No one gets to be left out of the invitation, as much as some of them wanted to leave out certain people, even entire nations.

Let’s get into it.

First of all, what was Pentecost? Pentecost was a harvest festival celebrating the beginning of wheat harvest for the Jewish people. It was one of those that people from miles around would come to Jerusalem and have a week-long party. That’s why there were people from so many different nations and languages present. But this year, this time, something happened. There was wind and fire and people from different countries that didn’t speak each other’s language, and they were understanding each other.

The message was clear: *We don’t have to be divided anymore. And...this new church is ONE church! We are unified because Jesus has just invaded our lives.*

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:20

<sup>2</sup> Acts 1:8

However, as wonderful as all of this might have felt to the believers that were gathered there, the crowd that gathered to witness it was just baffled. They had no choice but to start that they all had one too many...or maybe two or three.

It does beg the question early on, when was the last time we acted in such a way that the community around us had to start making up stories about us? What if we lived in such a way that others started asking, "What is it with those people? They live and act completely differently from the rest of the world?" What if we had a chance, like Peter did that day, to explain Who it is that loves us and calls us into a different kind of life?

So, Peter begins this first sermon not so much *to* the first Christians as *about* the first Christians and what God was doing in the world at that very historic moment. Although, I'm sure some of the Christians wanted to know what was happening as well.

Peter says, "They haven't been drinking! That's not the story here! It's only 9:00 in the morning." The crowd, I would imagine was waiting for Peter to say what *was* happening. Instead of speaking directly to it, Peter looks back. He opens up a Scripture from way back in their history, hundreds of years before, and says, "Listen to this from the prophet Joel! Joel predicted this specific, monumental moment that you're witnessing right now. Check it out!

I told a story last time I preached about a specific place, a moment in history, as a senior in high school, when I was holding hands with two different girls at the same time, and needing to make a decision about what this all meant. After I told that story, someone asked, "How did you know that choosing Wendy was the right way to go? There must be more to that story." They were right. It's a long and complicated story we don't have time for. But I will say that during the course of the previous rollercoaster months, Wendy had been writing letters to me, none of which she gave to me. She was only using the exercise as a journal for herself. When she gave them to me, the outside of the envelope had writing all over it.

*Written and sealed November 4. Scratched out. Opened, rewritten, resealed December 16. Scratched out. Open, rewritten, resealed January 4. About seven or eight rewrites.*

But all of the versions were included. As a move of desperation, she just sent them my way. And I can tell you, it was painful. She shared moments when she was really hurt by me, by my words or lack of attention or hurtful actions. It really shook me, as I had these pages

spread out on the floor. But even in the pain of it, she was also expressing a deep love.

I was cut to the heart.

So, in that moment, I did something that might seem rash. I got out an empty notebook and wrote in huge letters: "I'm going to marry Wendy McCaffree someday." (Of course, that was a month before the fateful night holding two different hands at a youth meeting. I'm really slow at taking action, even when it counts.)

Sometimes we forget that when we want to get a sense of what God is doing right *now*, we can look back on thousands of years of stories of God's people. Scripture is this packed love letter to us, God's people – written, sealed, opened, rewritten, resealed, opened, rewritten, resealed. Every time we open it, we find God in this living word calling us to be alive and pours out his Spirit on us again.

What is that moment that Peter finds Joel pointing to? The moment when (**see verse 18**) God will pour out His Spirit on (who?) ALL people. Throughout the Old Testament, God chose specific leaders, or prophets, or priests to be anointed to bring a word from God in a special way. Not that we shouldn't be on the lookout for God doing that today. But in *that* special moment, as predicted in Joel, *all* followers of Jesus received God's special anointing. Men *and* women, young *and* old, slaves *and* free, anyone could receive God's Spirit.

Hallelujah. God is good! All the time! This is where the message of Pentecost usually ends – with celebration for what God has done. But this isn't the whole picture. We really should have read further in this sermon. We only get a part of it here. But if you look down further, we discover how the crowd reacted to his message: The same way I did to Wendy's letters.

(Verse 37) *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart...*

This word from Joel starts out with good news. God's Spirit is being poured out. But then in verse 19, a shift happens. All the light goes away. *I will show portents in the heavens above and the earth below*, God says through Joel, *blood, fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood – before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.*

Peter was essentially saying, "This is good! But don't forget! It also means that this is a sign of being in the midst of scary times." The Day of the Lord, these people knew, didn't mean a day of peace and joy. It was a day

of judgment. God had to do justice on all that was wrong with the world, and all that is wrong with you and me. In Joel, it says that God's army comes with fire before it and a flame behind it (hints of Pentecost) devouring everything in its path.

*Truly the day of the Lord is great, terrible indeed.* To which Joel asks a rhetorical question: *Who can endure it?* The answer of course is: No one.<sup>3</sup>

Now this would be a horrible place to end for the week. Good news, we all have God's Spirit. Bad news, we won't survive what's coming.

I have a shirt that shares the whole Gospel message in three words. Also, it's the name of an album:

ORDER, DISORDER, REORDER.

God created all that is and said that it was good. Very good when he created us. In our rebellion we brought God's judgment: disorder. But God had a plan which he came up with at the beginning of time to reorder the relationship we can have with God. This is where Peter is heading. Don't worry.

But just for a moment, let's consider the possibility that we have taken our sin and God's judgment a little too lightly. In the process, we've eliminated the chance of being "cut to the heart" – of realizing the consequence our rebellion has had on us, and on our relationship to God.

Tim Keller said (you're probably going to get a few more of his quotes in these coming weeks after his passing), "Nobody who understands the free grace of God takes sin lightly."<sup>4</sup>

But couldn't the reverse also be true: Nobody who understands the depth of their sin takes the free grace of God lightly? In fact, what happens?

They're cut to the heart.

For the most part, the world, and if we're honest, even followers of Jesus, treat God's judgment as kind of like a joke. There were billboards and bumper stickers that came out years ago that said, "Jesus is coming." Then underneath: "Look busy." As if we can somehow trick or fool the Creator of all that is and will be into just looking the other way. Just a joke. Who actually talks about the judgment of God anymore? The man on the street corner with a sandwich board and a beard and shouting into a loudspeaker: "God's judgment is

coming". That guy. Christian television programs that play at 4 o'clock in the morning using fear as a way to entice people to give. That's who talk about judgment. Certainly not our church. We're all about grace! I'm not actually sure who talks about it. I grew up like most of you not hearing much about the judgment of God. A lot about the love of God. But judgment? Not as much. We've come to believe especially in the West, that the God we know would *never* judge because he's not actually that upset.

We're pretty good people, right? We're taught that for the most part from when we're quite young. There was a woman called Jean Twenge who wrote a book called Generation Me. She was trying to figure out why a generation of young people think so highly of themselves. She found that teaching around self-esteem was *the* most important thing you have to do with kids these days. Coloring books, posters, lessons that basically gave the message:

*You are special, you are a princess, you are a prince. Everything is right with you. No matter what it is that you want to do, that is a good thing. How ever you are feeling in this moment, that needs to be protected and we will make a safe space for it.*

In psychology, the language has moved away from any kind of guilt or responsibility for the things you do, too: *You're broken. You're wounded. You're a victim.* And these might be true, but they're all passive. It's the idea that everything has happened *to* us. The world has broken us. We didn't do any breaking. I'm special.<sup>5</sup>

What happens when you put together theology that doesn't talk about God's judgment and a psychology and culture that wants to eliminate any negative self-talk or emotion around ourselves and here's what you get:

God is too nice to judge a great person like me. [wink]

Heaven forbid that as we open up God's Word, we walk away feeling like we've been cut to the heart.

Do you remember who Jonathan Edwards is? Maybe the greatest theologian America ever produced. Living in the early 1700's, Jonathan Edward's ancestors came to America from England. He was a Puritan – a passionate, on fire bunch because of persecution they had faced. And, as usually happens after a time of getting more comfortable in their new home in America – with peace in the land comes a bit of a malaise. People

<sup>3</sup> Joel 2:11

<sup>4</sup> Keller, Tim. April 14, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Twenge, Jean. *Generation Me*. September, 2014.

sort of drifted away. But then, God started doing something amazing. It was known as the First Great Awakening. Thousands of people were gathering to hear preachers and coming to Jesus. People were being roused out of their slumber by some hard preaching about God's judgment first and then an amazing grace that followed.

There was a book that was required reading in schools in generations gone by called Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. It was a sermon by Jonathan Edwards. Usually, when people taught it, they would say things like: "I can't believe this guy would preach about hell and God's judgment... about God being angry." When he preached the sermon in a church in a town called Enfield, it was such a hard-hitting fire and brimstone message that people began to fall on the ground and cry and shriek. People were hanging on to posts that were supporting the building, afraid they would fall straight into hell. It got so bad, that Jonathan Edwards didn't get to finish his sermon. He didn't get to the good news.

It's interesting to even take a look at our translation of Scripture at the end of Peter's quote from Joel. The Book of Joel would have been in Hebrew, so Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, would have had to translate the Hebrew into Greek for the New Testament. Then, later scholars trying to put one word from Hebrew and one from Greek, in which there is not direct translation, here's what you get:

In Joel it reads like this:

*The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and **terrible** (NRSV) or **dreadful** (NIV) day of the Lord comes.<sup>6</sup>*

But when it gets translated to Greek by Luke, then English within the last few centuries we get this in Acts:

*The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and **glorious** (both NIV and NRSV) day of the Lord.*

All this to say: God takes sin seriously. A lot more seriously than we usually do.

We usually think of sin, of our own rebellion as something bad, even something to avoid talking about. It just brings us down, and God's grace covers it anyway. But if we miss the opportunity to see our need for God, we'll miss the joy in Christ as our Savior.

And as Tim Keller also says: *The sin underneath all other sin is a lack of joy in Christ.*

Here's my quick case for why sin is good.

1. It's a visible sign of where we are with God, that something is not right. When we grab a loaf of bread, we want to be able to see the mold. It's a good thing, so we know that something is not right with it.
2. It reminds us that we are all in the same boat. It's not some of us are in the good boat and some of us in the bad boat. We're all in the Titanic. None of us can claim to have sin figured out.
3. It causes a needed reaction, or at least it should. When our hand hits the hot stove, we feel pain, and that pain serves a purpose of causing us to quickly remove our hand from the stove.

When we ignore our sin, we eat the bread, we keep our hand on the hot stove, and we stay on the boat even when the rescuers come. All in all, sin points us to our need for God.

It cuts to the heart.

But that's definitely not the end of Peter's sermon. And that's not the end of *this* sermon. But don't worry, we're wrapping it up with the "REORDERING" of God's love.

Peter offers to us the good news that also came straight out of the Book of Joel: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

There is a way out that God has provided for us. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. What does it mean to *call upon*? Taking clues from Scripture, allow yourself to be cut to the heart. Take sin seriously enough to see what Christ did for you.

Then, you surrender. You surrender to the only one who can love you back into completion again.

When we open scripture and really listen to the full gospel message, we open it and God says:

"Really, you're not that great. I mean, you were made in my image, and I love you regardless. But what you've done is turned away from me, the one who made you, who said you will only find really joy in me; you've spat in my face, and tried to find your joy everywhere else in

<sup>6</sup> Joel 2:31

the world: through your work, through achievements, through sex, through money, through anything that's not me."

And we try all of these things over and over and they always leave us empty.

And God keeps coming back and saying: Are you ready this time? Are you ready to call on me? I still love you. I'm still offering you salvation, not just for an eternity, but right now, for this life.

This great news is even found in Joel right in the middle of all the doom and gloom. He offers the same thing with a great promise:

Rend (or tear open) your heart, and not your garments (the people were tearing their clothes as an outward show of their grief about sin, but God wanted the inward show of it). Return to the Lord, for he is...what?

Going to judge you accordingly?

No. For he is gracious and compassionate.<sup>7</sup>

God is gracious and compassionate. This is the God who created us. This is the God we've turned away from in our own efforts to fix things. This is the God who welcomes us back into his arms when we simply cry out in surrender.

So, Peter is saying to the crowd: You want to know what happened over there. Those are the people that have repented and been baptized. They have surrendered their lives and have experienced the grace and compassion of a God who loves them even in their rebellion, because he paid the price on the cross for them.

I heard a quote on a television show this week. I'm not going to tell you what show, but this character, who happens to also be a soccer coach, in a moment that required thoughtfulness, said, *I hope that either all of us or none of us are judged by the actions of our weakest moments, but by the strength we show when and if we're ever given a second chance.*<sup>8</sup>

We should all be encouraged that God's promises are for third chances, fourth chances, and one hundredth chances as well. This was fresh news for these "fellow Jews and everyone who lives in Jerusalem". It can still be fresh for us. Here's how the sermon wraps up. (Mine, too, in case you were starting to wonder).

*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—*

*With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them. And those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

May it be so again.

Amen.

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### ***NEXT STEP***

1. Read Acts 2:14-21. What word, verse, or theme stands out to you?
2. Why does Peter use these words from Joel to speak to the crowd about what they were witnessing?
3. The word "glorious" in verse 20 referring to the Day of the Lord might also be more accurately translated as "awesome" or even "dreadful". How does this change our understanding of the way it might have been heard by the people?
4. What do you think Tim Keller meant when he said, "Nobody who understands the free grace of God takes sin lightly"?
5. Do you think we (as a church, denomination or individuals) take sin too *seriously* or too *lightly*?
6. A case was made for why sin is good. Do you agree with this theory of how sin may serve a purpose in our lives?
7. Read ahead to verses 37 and 38. The people are responding to Peter's sermon. What does it look like to be "cut to the heart"? Have you ever experienced being cut to the heart in your own faith journey?
8. What would it look like for us as a church to *call upon the Lord*?

### ***TABLE TO TABLE:***

Do you think we really *need* God?  
What does it mean to *call upon God* if we need Him?

<sup>7</sup> Joel 2:13

<sup>8</sup> Ted Lasso.