

Trust in the Lord

Homily for October 9, 2021

One of the challenges when reading the Old Testament passages like the one from Joel is to say yep this is English but it could just as easily be written in Hebrew, because it does not seem to make much sense to someone living 2700 years later, in Calgary! What for instance is the valley of Jehoshaphat?

So let's see if I can help make sense of these complicated verses. Joel is writing in a biblical genre called "Apocalyptic". He is revealing something about the future, (the meaning of the word "apocalyptic) that points to judgment on the one hand, and fulfillment of God's purpose of establishing good for his people, on the other.

In a sense what we read here in a dozen verses, the Book of Revelation takes 22 chapters to reveal, that is why it is called the Big Apocalypse.

The reference to the Valley of Jehoshaphat is the valley of Judgment, the meaning of the word "Jehoshaphat". The name also refers to the 4th King of Judah, who reigned from around 873 to 849 B.C.,¹. He is most remembered for his defeat of Judah's perennial enemies, the Moabites and the Ammonites. As the enemy was approaching he prayed:

O our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

After he prayed the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel a Levite who proclaimed:

Fear not, and be not dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's. Fear not, and be not dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the LORD will be with you."

It is this story Joel has in mind when he talks about the Valley of Jehoshaphat. All those forces opposed to God will be brought to judgment and finally defeated, a theme that is restated at the end of our reading today:

***Egypt shall become a desolation
and Edom a desolate wilderness,
because of the violence done to the people of Judah,
in whose land they have shed innocent blood.***²

But there is another grander theme expressed in this reading, the vindication of the people of God. Agricultural imagery is used to express the nature of the blessed life.

¹ Hahn, S. (Ed.). (2009). In [Catholic Bible Dictionary](#) (p. 421). New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday.

² [The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version](#). (1989). (Joe 3:19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

*In that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the stream beds of Judah
shall flow with water;
a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Wadi Shittim.³*

*But Judah shall be inhabited forever,
and Jerusalem to all generations.⁴*

Here is language of abundance and God's extravagant generosity that declares the promise that God will fulfill his purposes for his people. This is language that finds its fullest expression towards the end of Revelation:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.⁵

The language we have been considering today is a kind of poetic expression that is to leave an impression on our minds and hearts. We are not to be afraid of the things that seem so cataclysmic in life, but trust in the Lord. We do this by taking to heart the words of Jesus from today's Gospel knowing that we are blessed when we hear the word of God and do them.

To do today's first reading doesn't require so much an action, but forming an attitude, where we affirm that God is working out his purpose. Although it is so often hidden from us, here we are given a revealing that is to encourage us to continue to trust in the Lord.

³ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Joe 3:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Joe 3:20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Re 22:1–2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.