



Joel 2.¹²⁻¹⁴— Meditation

- ¹²Therefore also now, saith the LORD,
turn ye even to me with all your heart,
and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning:
¹³And rend your heart, and not your garments,
and turn unto the LORD your God:
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and of great kindness,
and repenteth him of the evil.
¹⁴Who knoweth if he will return and repent,
and leave a blessing behind him...

I have always been intrigued by the question Joel asks in verse 14. “Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing” (NIV). This question follows on the heels of Joel’s list of Divine attributes. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, extraordinarily kind, and is inclined to relent. It is only this list of Divine attributes that makes the question possible. It is only this list of Divine attributes that allows for a positive answer, “I think He will. I think He will relent and bless rather than curse.” God does relent. It is in His DNA. There are times when His majestic attributes bring Him to relent, independent of any outside factors. The Psalmist knows this and counts on it.

“Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies
and thy lovingkindnesses;
for they have been ever of old.
Remember not the sins of my youth,
nor my transgressions:
according to thy mercy remember thou me
for thy goodness’ sake, O LORD” [on account of the fact that you are good].¹

Sometimes, He relents for the simple reason that we asked Him to. There was a certain and particularly reckless debtor who owed millions of dollars. As he was being carried off to debtor’s prison, he pleaded with the loaner to forgive the debt. What else could he do? There was no world in which he could ever acquire the resources to pay off the debt—one wonders why the loaner didn’t cut off his funds long before. Unbelievably, the loaner canceled the debt. Later, the loaner explained his actions.

“I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me.”²

Of course, in this parable, the loaner is God. And just see how our desires impact him! He cares and responds to our desires. There are other times, as in today’s passage, when he relents because we have

¹ Psalm 25.⁶⁻⁷

² Matthew 18.³²

repented. Sometimes that repentance is wrenching. Sometimes it requires that we tear ourselves to pieces. But such rending is not masochistic. It is always performed with our faces turned to God. We only rend ourselves because we know that He will reassemble us better than before.

But whether God is relenting because of His own inner desire to do so, or because He values and responds to our humble desires, or because, having rent ourselves, we are in need of repair, God relents because of His own largeness of soul. Because he is gracious and merciful. Because He has a long-fuse and is not easily or quickly angered. Because His kindness is as expansive as the universe itself.

So, go ahead. Rend your heart during Lent. But be sure you are not doing it to be seen of others. Be sure, even, that you aren't doing it in the mirror, to allay your own wounded conscious. Be sure you are fully facing God. Be sure to do it so that He knows you want to be made new and that you are absolutely sure that only He can and will renew you. Then, truly, Lent will be followed by Easter, the time of renewal.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

(edition: april 23, 2024)