

Sermon: Growing into Call Each Season
Scripture: Joel 2:23-32; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18
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Christian Ko Choi
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Springfield, Illinois

Joel 2:23-32

Our first scripture is from Joel 2:23-32. Prophet Joel's poems address the need of Israelites to prayerfully repent after many devastations they have experienced as the result of the people's sin against God. Then Joel shares what would come next: the promise of God's blessings for the people of God. Hear now that blessing for all of us this morning.

²³ O children of Zion, be glad,
and rejoice in the LORD your God,
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.

²⁴ The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁷ You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel
and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁸ Then afterward
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

²⁹ Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days I will pour out my spirit.

³⁰ I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³² Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Amen.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Our second scripture reading comes from 2 Timothy 4:6-8 followed by 16-18. These are the final words of encouragement to Timothy and other follower of Christs as Paul he faces certain death in his near future. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

⁶ As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. ⁸ From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

¹⁶ At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Growing into Call Each Season

Please join me in a prayer. Holy and loving God, we come before you today, just as we are. Some of us are beaten from our daily challenges while some of us are excited to venture into the unknowns of tomorrow. Whatever shape we might be in this morning, may you pour out your Holy Spirit upon all of us that your Word become a source of strength to our souls and bring peace to our hearts this morning. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

There are many wise sayings that we all have heard as we grew up. Many of us did not understand the fullness of its meaning until years later as we ourselves have weathered many storms of life and walked through our life's journey that we grasp the truth that these statements are rooted in. One of the sayings that I grew up with when I was a child by many beloved people in my life was that the time is like the water in the river. It cannot go back where it once came from, and time is just like that water; once it flows, one cannot get it back.

For the longest time, I thought that this simply meant that I should not be idle or lazy but simply make the most of the time that is given and use it to my advantage. While it is absolutely true and I have benefitted from trying to make the most of each time and situation, I wished that they would have been forthright in sharing with me on the deeper meaning of that phrase that there would be accumulation of losses that each of us have to bear. Life is full of losses, and it begins with time. Each moment, each second that passes by it means we lose something forever. But closely entwined with time are the losses of various types and dimensions and no one is immune to it. I'm not talking about misplacing your car keys, your wallet, or losing your phone but the ones that has an emotional loss attached to it; loss of a beloved ones, loss of an opportunity, loss of a jobs or the ability to support the family, the loss of relationships or broken relationships, and the loss of health or the way an individual once used to be.

Even in our successes, we lose what we once held dear and the way it used to be. When we get a promotion or transition into something better, it means a change – which also means loss of the previous ways. Loss means change and it means pain because it means we need to learn to adapt and live with unwanted and unexpected changes in our lives. How do we manage to stay afloat in the river of life and continue on our journey? Some people just float down the river, hoping for the best. However, if we take a moment and reflect our lives of how we have been able to traversed to this point in our lives, I think the answer is in one of Dr. Kieffer's favorite imageries of the Bible, and that is us being in the Potter's hand. We are being fashioned into what God wants us to be for that particular season in our lives.

We believe in the God who not only wants reconciliation but also restoration. Of course, it is rightly assumed that once a relationship is reconciled, it is restored, yet God does not want to stop there. Our God is mighty and radical God. God wants each of us being restored to our created purpose and potential. Whenever we experience a loss – for better or for worse – God will continue to be at our side and restore us to be able to do what we are being called to do. What we confuse ourselves with is the notion that once we are restored, we will be able to do what we did prior to our loss, but sometimes we will be restored to be a part of repurposed project.

One of the great memories of youth mission trip is that two years ago, we had a chance to serve Little Rock in the midst of pandemic. At Ferncliff, our home away from home, we created a repurpose garden to bring charm and enhance their garden that was not being kept well in previous years. After we have finished setting the foundation of the garden, the next groups were planning to restore various donated items to create a place where natural wonder can be experienced by visitors and their outdoor preschool kids. As we all knew, the pandemic uncovered how many people deal with losses each day, and the needs were overwhelming. What congregation might not know is that trip to Little Rock started because few youth leaders have asked and volunteered to go on a mission trip that year. Sure, the youth and their families knew of the risk, yet they asked for mission trip to not stand idle, that they felt called to do something about it.

To do something great on that mission trip, our youth needed restoring of their own losses too. Their lives had been turned upside down with new procedures and guidelines of distancing and remote learning – which is ridiculous to ask a teenager not be with their friends. It meant facing their own losses of interrupted relationships due to COVID and loss of comfortability of previous mission trip as we created our own mission trip. Yet we serve a God who restores us to the fullest when we answer God's call. Maybe it is this specific reason that 2021 mission trip is one of the most memorable mission trips for all who were involved.

Paul's letter to Timothy is no different. In his season of life while writing this letter in prison, it seems in my view, the only way that Paul was able to write such a compassionate, encouraging letter is because he himself was restored as he committed to answer his call in his season of life. To borrow his own words, 'to pour himself out as the offering to God and to others.' We are no different from Paul and we are all recipients of same blessing. For every loss we might have, we have been given greater number of restoration and the opportunity to answer God by Godself.

In various seasons, we will be called to do different things and different amount of work. There will be time to celebrate the harvest that is here but also a time to be even more diligent. Sometimes a period of waiting is also in order. In whatever call God gives on your heart or in your path, let us confidently walk in it, trusting that God will do all things for those who love God and follow God.

Also, let us be a strong and courageous spiritual family of God. Trusting that God will restore us to our fullest, let us dare to boldly answer God's call in our hearts. Our children will continue to speak and show us what it means to believe in Jesus as their pure hearts guides us to follow God's ways; that our experienced and wise members of the spiritual family will continue to dream, support, and encourage the best actions and ways to exemplify God's love to the world through our collective ministry, and let all men and women live out our faith callings, to be the hands and feet, to make that vision and dreams come fruition.

Let us live with a healthy dose of carpe diem as we float down in our river of life and grow into our call in each season of our lives, as we sing praises to the Lord. Amen.