

## Joel 2:12-17

<sup>12</sup> Yet even now, says the LORD,  
return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

<sup>13</sup> rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the LORD, your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,  
and relents from punishing.

<sup>14</sup> 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?

<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
sanctify a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

<sup>16</sup> gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation;

assemble the aged;  
gather the children,  
even infants at the breast.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
and the bride her canopy.

<sup>17</sup> Between the vestibule and the altar  
let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.

Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD,  
and do not make your heritage a mockery,  
a byword among the nations.

Why should it be said among the peoples,  
'Where is their God?'"

## 2 Corinthians 6:1-12

6 As we work together with him,<sup>[a]</sup> we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says,

“At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! <sup>3</sup> We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup> beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup> by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup> truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup> in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup> as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

<sup>11</sup> We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. <sup>12</sup> There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours.

Prayer of Invocation:

Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life,  
Creating us to serve you and neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of tenderness,  
And strengthen us to face our mortality, that we may reach with confidence for your mercy;  
in Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and  
forever.

Call to Confession:

**Leader: Holy and merciful God, we confess to you and to one another, and to the whole communion of saints in heaven and on earth, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.**

**People:** We have not loved you with our whole heart, and mind, and strength.  
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.  
We have not forgiven others as we have been forgiven.

Litany of Confession:

The spirit of remorse is not in us.

We fail to notice our own transgressions.

We blame others for the same faults we find in ourselves.

We hide our sins, imagining God's punishment to be severe.

We hide from one another, imagining that no one could understand our failures and regrets.

O Lord, put a new spirit within me-

***Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.***

The spirit of truth is not in us.

We fail to tell the truth with blatant lies, deceptive half-truths, and omitted details.

We blame others for being so gullible and just as dishonest.

We hide from the truth, expecting that God will turn a blind eye to our falsehoods.

We hide from one another, expecting not to get caught in our untruthfulness.

O Lord, put a new spirit within me-

***Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.***

The spirit of joy is not in us.

We fail to show gladness in our hearts.

We blame others for our sadness and despair.

We hide our delight, thinking that God expects us to be serious and solemn.

We hide from one another, because we are afraid that the joy of the moment never lasts.

O Lord, put a new spirit within me-

***Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.***

The spirit of forgiveness is not in us.

We fail to offer kindness and compassion to our friends and neighbors.

We blame others for messing up our lives with their transgressions.

We hide our mercy, preferring that God would exact judgment.

We hide from one another, holding grudges until we no longer know what we are holding them for.

O Lord, put a new spirit within me-

***Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.***

The spirit of gratitude is not in us.

We fail to say thank you all the time, and yet...

We blame others for not appreciating our gifts.

We hide our appreciation, assuming that God owes us an abundant and easy life.

We hide from one another, feeling underappreciated and ignored rather than stepping up to a generous and giving life.

O Lord, put a new spirit within me-

***Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.***

The spirit of whole-heartedness is not in us.

We fail to be vulnerable to the ups and downs of life.

We blame others when we prefer a safe life over openly living a full life.

We hide our hearts, and forget that God touches them with such tenderness.

We hide from each other, assuming that our hearts are far too easily broken when it's in the brokenness that we discover each other anew.

O Lord, put a new spirit within me-

*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.*

O Lord, put a new spirit within us all-

*Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.*

Declaration of Forgiveness:

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken heart, a contrite spirit. We know that our spirits are not always right with God, but God can put a new spirit in us: a spirit of remorse, a spirit of truth, a spirit of joy, a spirit of forgiveness, a spirit of gratitude, and a spirit that heals our heart and makes it whole again. Know that God hears the cries of our hearts, the longings of our spirits, and makes all things new through Jesus Christ who loves us completely – just as we are. Amen.

March 1, 2017 & February 14, 2018  
Ash Wednesday, With All Your Heart  
Kerra Becker English

Return to me with all your heart.

Rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Our heart is open wide to you.

There is no restriction in our affections.

God wants us to live whole-heartedly.

No restriction, no contraction of our love.

Tear open your heart with weeping and wailing, with fasting and mourning.

We'd rather not.

Most of us have learned that our hearts are to be fiercely protected.

Hide them. Shield them. Don't let anyone see what's in there.

"They" might use it against you.

"They" might see your soft side, your vulnerabilities, and then know what would be your greatest loss.

Return to the Lord – the one who is always gracious, always merciful.

Show God your heart. And you will be blessed.

Your sins will be no more. Obstacles will be overcome out of love.

But where shall we make this sacrifice?

Where can we go to open our hearts?

Call a solemn assembly.

Gather people that you know both young and old.

Walk away from other important events. Leave any worldly cares behind.

Come to the place where the priests weep for God's people.

Come to the place where the servants of God endure hardships of every kind for the sake of love.

Come to the place where you have known God's love.

And let your heart crack open.

God will tell us:

I don't want your silly sacrifices, your Lenten attempts to show off your will power.

I want your love.

Pope Francis called for a fast on indifference.

That sounds more like the sacrifice God wants.

Actually SEE the people around you.

Actually LOVE the people around you.

We have been known to restrict our affections, much like the Corinthians.

We have hoarded our love away and brought it out like the good silverware for special occasions.

Not any more, not in this season, not in this assembly.

Our hearts are open.

Our hearts are open because our time is limited.

Our hearts are open because this time is precious.

Our hearts are open while they beat within us.

Because one day our hearts, our beat up, knocked around, broken, open hearts will beat no more.

And we will return to the dust.

Today, choose to give God your heart.

Today, choose to open your heart to others.

Today, imagine your heart as God's gift to you, and your gift back to God.

Blessing:

May the God of peace make you holy in every way  
And keep your whole being –  
Spirit, soul, and body –  
Free from every fault  
At the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

(Thanks be to God.)