

- X Every year at this time we give thanks for all the blessings God has given us and we have a time to reflect on the world in which we find ourselves.
- ✓ And, every year, as I think about the times we are living in, I think about the opening paragraph of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*:
 - It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way— in short...
- X ...These are the times we live in today, and these were the times in which the prophet Joel lived: a time of desolation and a time of rejoicing;
 - ✓ The three short chapters of the book of Joel opens with the worst of times:
 - It was a national crisis: a plague of locusts...
 - Which Joel describes in the most foreboding words in the Bible: It is "the Day of the Lord; a day of darkness and gloom; a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
nor will be after them in ages to come.
Fire devours in front of them and behind them a flame burns;
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,
but after them a desolate wilderness,
and nothing escapes them." (2:1-3)
 - ✓ Yet in the next chapter, we see (in today's reading) a complete turnaround:
 - "Do not fear...be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!" (3:21)
 - God has given an abundance of rain and overflowing crops
 - ✓ And the question we must ask is: How do we get from desolation to rejoicing? From living in terror... to setting aside our fears?
- X There are locusts in every age:

- ✓ In Joel's time, in the excesses that led to and followed from the French Revolution and now as many sit in fear at the onslaughts of the Islamic State
- ✓ ...we encounter situations that are like "blackness spread upon the mountains."
- ✗ And how do we respond to these locusts?
 - ✓ Some immediately go into the attack mode: let's smack down the locusts with cluster bombs
 - ✓ Some become depressed and shut down: civil society is doomed, so let's just build an impregnable wall to keep the locusts out
 - ✓ Others want to blame someone—anyone—for the troubles they are in (Obamacare; secret government laboratories in the tri-Cities where locusts are bred in abundance)
- ✗ Here's what Joel says our response should be: it's simple, yet very difficult: repent, turn to God, and place our faith in God.
- ✗ How, then will God respond?
 - ✓ Joel says that when we repent, God responds by putting things right. God will protect us from our enemies; God will provide our basic needs.
 - ...the fruit of trees; figs, wine and oil, grain...
 - "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied..."(2: 21-26)
 - ✓ Much in the same way that Jesus told his disciples not to worry, for "even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows [two of which are sold for a small coin.] (Mt 10:30)
- ✗ But somehow, this is not completely satisfactory. It still leaves us in a bipolar state bouncing back and forth between the best and worst of times.
 - ✓ God has more in store for us than providing the necessities of life and leading us to think that we're in the best of times.
 - ✓ In the very next paragraph (which is not in our reading today), Joel informs us that God will do much more than this:
 - "Then afterward [God says] I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men will dream dreams,

and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit." (2: 28-29)

- X Not only will God provide us the basic necessities, God will give us the Spirit in abundance, and not only to prophets but to everyone, both old and young, male and female, slave and free.
 - ✓ As we are all given the Spirit, we will have a way out of being caught in the ricochet from best of times to the worst of times...
 - ✓ This is not just the best of times and the worst of times; it's a completely different time...a new world
 - ✓ We Christians understand that new world to be the Kingdom of God.
 - We understand that this new world began at with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
- X So...at Thanksgiving, as we approach the season of Advent and as we consider the Dickensian state of our lives,
 - ✓ It's also a time to consider where we are in the continuum that Joel portrays, the continuum from the Day of the Locust to the Day of sons and daughters prophesying.
- X It's a time to consider where we are on that continuum and what should we do about it?
 - ✓ if we're living in the Day of the Locust, then it is God's hope that we realize (or someone will be kind enough to tell us) that we need help.
 - ✓ If we're living in the time of Repentance, it's the time when we finally understand that God can help and will help and that we need to ask for God's forgiveness for things done and left undone.
 - ✓ If we live in the Time of Blessings, then we know that God provides and that we should be grateful for all the basic necessities of life that God has given us.
 - This is where I generally reside on Thanksgiving Days
 - We have turned to God and God has responded, and we are content with our lives.
 - ✓ But God wants us to be in that next stage: Living in the Spirit.
 - It's the state that is described in the Post-Communion Thanksgiving that we offer up in the Eucharistic Prayer C (Interstellar Space)

- “Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. [Stage 3: the time of Blessings]. Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this table for solace only and not for strength; for pardon only and not for renewal. [This is where we enter into Stage 4, Living in the Spirit.] Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.” (BCP 372)

✘ This is the New World; this is the Kingdom of God:

- ✓ In which the Spirit is poured out on everyone and we are pulled out of this dichotomy from the the season of light and the season of dark into a season when we see the world with new eyes
 - We see the potentialities of a world:
 - Where we no longer have to live in fear of what the locusts may do to us
 - Where we no longer sit down contented while people around us are in need
 - We no longer take God’s intervention in the world for granted.
- ✓ Instead we open ourselves to being moved by the Spirit
 - To push our chairs back from their comfortable position around the Thanksgiving spread
 - And say, “thank you, God, for having given us your abundance,
 - but now, help us to bring you into this world though our hands.”
- ✓ We know that the Kingdom of God came with the birth of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit,
 - We also know that God wants to be present in this world, but he wants to be made tangible through men and women, sons and daughters, slaves and free persons.
 - This is the mystery of our existence. This is the superhuman chance of humankind.
- ✓ This is the Kingdom of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.