

Ash Wednesday, Feb. 2009
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17
Title: The Two Trumpets of Lent
Feb. 25, 2009

Blow the Trumpet in Zion!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, return the Lord your God with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, rend your hearts and not your clothing.

I want to commend you for being here today....to enter into Lent. Lent is not an easy process, it's a faith process. It's not business as usual, it's a faith stimulus package. It's not a feel good experience, it's a faith good experience. So coming here in worship, receiving a smudge of ashes on your body, listening to these assaulting and haunting passages of scripturefrankly it's just plain difficult.

In the wisdom of the church year, we are given these jolting six weeks to turn over the tables of our lives, to awaken from complacency, to break the easy indifference which can shackle us, to notice our urgent need for God.

You showed up for this. You showed up to have the furniture rearranged; you showed up to admit that what may look good on the outside is rotting on the inside; you showed up to plead for mercy, you showed up to ask for a new beginning, to start over. You showed up.

That may not be why you showed up. But nonetheless I commend you for being here.

Someone else is also here. We have a church mouse. I saw it with my own four eyes. This tiny beast followed its nose into room E-12 where our Faith In the Home Team was gathered. The rascal looked up and noticed we were there and with all its might turned that corner going about 60 mph and high tailed it out of there into hiding.

Now that my friends in Christ is no way to enter into Lent. To look up and see these huge matters and turn tail and run. They will still be there when you come out again.

WE CAN skip Lent and head straight to Easter. Christ is Risen! God has righted all the wrongs! The victory is ours! His love wins! Alleluia. To skip Lent is to pass over what victory is about, that we may have jettisoned faithfulness, but God hasn't. To skip Lent is to ignore what about us has broken God's heart.

When Jesus critiques the hypocrites for their false piety, they are in a sense skipping Lent. They are doing all the right things—prayer, fasting and alms giving-- for all the wrong reasons and don't recognize it. They miss the connection between the rituals and purpose of the rituals. Rending their clothing, not their hearts They are in a crisis and don't know it. How truly sad.

To remember that you are dust is to turn toward God who is congruent in mercy. It's to ask how are we doing in faith, love and obedience to the will of this God.

I commend you for being here and for noticing your urgent need for God.

For we can get side tracked. We can be less than we were called to be. Complacency has a way of making us settled with the way things are.

Is it fair to say that this faith community recently entered into Lent. For a long time we have noticed a precipitous drop in our children attending worship. We lived with it. We may not have liked it but it was just the way things were. We were used to it. We left it alone. But it grew and spread and like a shivering mouse before this matter we looked at it and ran the other way.

We came to our senses. We embraced our true situation. We didn't use these words, but I will: we repented, we rend our hearts, we return to the

Lord—who calls us to a fuller life in Him. To center our lives in Him is to put worship first.

The Prophet Joel gives us a glimpse into spiritual renewal. In the passage before us two trumpets are blown. The first trumpet names the crisis. To hear this trumpet is to awaken us. Its startling sound jars our awareness. The second trumpet calls us to action to move beyond business as usual. Here we seek to conform our lives to Christ. Here we seek to live more congruently with God.

Both trumpets matter. The first trumpet without the second suggests we are stuck, we can't grow and change. The second trumpet without the first makes our action unnecessary. Together these trumpets make life giving music.

Blow the trumpet in Raleigh--our lives are under deep assault. Steroid abuse, mortgage foreclosure, bailouts used and abused these are but surface symptoms of a deadly sickness. Blow the trumpet—let all the inhabitants of the land tremble.

Ash Wednesday is for noticing our situation before God.

Blow the trumpet in Raleigh—call a solemn assembly, gather the people, assemble the aged, the young, let the ministers of the Lord weep.

Let the sound of the trumpet carry both our crisis and our hope in the Lord.

Blow the Trumpet in Zion. Amen