

# *Listening for the Promise*

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Ash Wednesday – March 2, 2022

*“Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love.”*

*-Joel 2:13-*

Ash Wednesday marks the first day of Lent, a season of reflection on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; a season of contemplation, repentance, prayer, and fasting. As we ponder Jesus, we cannot but marvel at His unsurpassable love for us revealed in his death on the cross. For our sake, he left a place free of pain and want, a place saturated with beauty and love, a place of face-to-face intimacy with the Father, and He willingly embraced pain and suffering. He did this because He loves us so much that He would do (and did do) anything for us. He did this because he longs for relationship with us, both now and for all eternity.

Announcing the coming of the Messiah, the prophet Joel called for a return to relationship with the Lord. He called for repentance approximately 800 years before Jesus' birth. Like Joel, in his earthly ministry, Jesus preached repentance too.

When I was younger, messages of repentance seemed harsh and demanding, coming from a terrifying, ruthless god who kept an arsenal of lightning bolts ready to launch at anyone who failed to live according to his exacting ways. But that god looks nothing like Jesus.

Yes, Jesus preached repentance, but he did so because he wants so much more for us than we often want for ourselves. He knows our attraction to ignoble gods like self-centeredness, greed, pride, selfish ambition, hatred, anger, and lust, just to name a few. He also knows that serving these gods results in spiritual death.

So, he calls us to repent and, in this call to repent, God offers us a tremendous gift. He offers a Divine Exchange. He says, “Give me your puny, counterfeit gods that only temporarily satisfy but ultimately leave you empty and looking for more, and I will give you myself. I will help you walk with me, and you will experience my love, compassion, companionship, joy, and peace. I will transform your life as you receive my grace, love, forgiveness, and follow me. I will give you purpose and eternal, abundant life, both now and forever.” Truly, he gives us an amazing exchange. We give so very little, and He gives us more than we could ever ask or imagine.