

## A Meditation on Joel 2

*“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” (2:12)*

The world trembles. My heart grieves.

*Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. (2:15)*

Prayer vigils and candles being lifted up ...

*Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. (2:16a)*

... For mothers in subway tunnels embracing frightened children.

*Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (2:13)*

But what if calamity has already come?

*Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. (2:16b-17a)*

Sadness, acknowledgment of suffering. Suffering, a path to empathy. Empathy, an acceptance of the Cross. The Cross, where Jesus embraces all.

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So easy do I find it to apply these words to Ukraine. To support my friend Greg, who has a personal relationship with a Ukrainian priest. To support my friend Sheryl, who likewise knows Ukrainian ex-pats personally and lives in a city where 10% of the populace is Slavic. To embrace the collective narrative of the West ringing out from church steeples and seats of government.

And this is how it should be! And yet ...

I wonder why I did not connect these words to those suffering in the Congo, in Guatemala and in Syria. Do geopolitical concerns shape and form my moral compass? Is my compassion limited to those who look like me (or perhaps it is more profoundly provoked)? And what role does our national narrative play to inspire passion and outburst (with my heart tempted to hate *our* primordial enemy, Russia!)? Is Russia (or Putin or the Oligarchs) really our *primordial* enemy, or is there another, whose name is The Accuser, for whom I should reserve my hatred?

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*Then the Lord was jealous for his land and took pity on his people. (2:17)*

Lord, in your mercy, have pity on your people — all of them.