I understand that Joel wrote his book over a period of years about 800 B.C. It had been written to the people of Judah who had become prosperous and complacent. They were taking God for granted; had turned to self-centredness, idolatry and sin. Joel was warning them of God’s impending judgement because of their sinful ways and encouraging them to turn back to God.

In the first part of this evening’s reading Joel contrasts the fear of God’s judgement with the joy of God’s intervention. On the “Day of the Lord” (a reference to the coming of the Messiah) he says that sins will bring judgement and only God’s forgiveness will bring rejoicing. He is saying that failure to repent of your sin will result in punishment but by letting God interfere in your life you will have nothing to fear. WE know from our own experiences that God’s forgiveness gives US a purpose in life and helps us to establish a caring community

Joel prophesies “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten ...... you will have plenty to eat and will praise he name of the Lord your God”

Over history Jews have suffered captivity in Babylon, slavery in Egypt and under the Greeks and Romans, and not forgetting the atrocities during our lifetime by the Hitler regime. Each time they have recovered and rejoiced in God’s promise being fulfilled.

The second part of the reading was quoted verbatim by Peter so as that were read in first lesson, I chose to have verses 22 -38 which were his thoughts on the prophecy. My conclusion was that he had preached the first Christian sermon – he had taken a piece of scripture and spoke to the assembled people about it. We all do that every time we preach. However, I discovered I had reinvented the wheel as William Barclay had made that same point some 100 years earlier!!

I was very impressed that Peter was able to make that quotation from memory but of course he was a Jew and a good Jewish boy he would have learned many parts of scripture by heart as part of his education so at the age about in his thirties it would be reasonably in his memory. When I was a boy much learning was by rote and some 70 years later some still remains in my memory. As an example, there is an old saying “if you waken at night cannot sleep don’t count sheep, talk to the shepherd.” I find myself going through Morning or Evening Prayer (BCP) sometimes including a short Psalm, a reading and, if I have not fallen asleep by then, a Collect (probably Advent or Lent) all from memory. The difference being that Peter appears not to have made any mistakes whereas I often leave chunks out.

One phrase in Joel’s prophecy hit me between the eyes: “Old men will dream dreams”. True. I’m quite good at it – perhaps a substitution for something more physical. Sometimes they are quite bizarre as I speak to my parents who died about 40 odd years ago, others of my playing sports – still with more enthusiasm than skill. Then I wake up with no conclusion and my thought “If only”. An old man dreaming dreams and now back to reality.

Peter does not miss his hearers and hit the wall. Straight to the knockout punch. “Joel had warned you of the Day of the Lord; he was here, and you missed him. More, YOU delivered him to be crucified” and that had the desired effect. The people asked “What shall we do? And that is the basic question we must be ask ourselves. Repent and be baptised and you will be saved was Peter’s instruction and many of them did just that. We have been baptised, so we repent and let God forgive and continue to live the repentant life.

Funny how things pop up in memory. Our old Rector in Belfast (we did not have Vicars in Ireland) in preparing us for confirmation gave us a little rhyme

It’s not enough to say I’m sorry and repent

And then go on from day to day just as I always went.

Repentance is 5o love the things I loved before

And show that I in earnest grieve by doing them no more

Perhaps a bit much to expect anyone to follow without slipping, but I have had over 70 years since then to try – with mixed success.