

Gathered, Found, and Sent

September 14, 2025

Welcome home, friends!

This is ReUnion Sunday, the day we gather the scattered, bless the new year of ministry, and remember that the Spirit is still weaving us together.

Our scripture from Joel is such an obvious text for such a day—gather everyone together.

But the context of our passage isn't exactly cheerful. Locusts have devoured the land. Drought has dried up the fields. Everything looks hopeless. The prophet describes it with painful poetry:

“What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten;
what the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten;
what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.”

That's a total wipeout. And not just crops—it was their livelihoods, their food supply, their whole future. And then came drought. No way to replant. Nothing to look forward to.

And it's right there—when the people are most demoralized—that Joel hears God's call: Gather the people. Call everyone together. Not just the holy ones or the strong ones. Everyone.

The aged crone and the babe at the breast.
The couple on their wedding night.
The priests, the workers, the ordinary ones.

Everyone is needed. Everyone is summoned. Because when the world feels like it's unraveling, the only faithful response is to come together.

That feels like a word for us right now. Because let's be honest, the locusts and drought are a metaphor. Violence and cruelty. Cynicism and despair. A culture that keeps telling us safety comes by ridding ourselves of the “other,” by wiping out differing opinions, at the end of a gun.

The theologian Walter Wink called it “the myth of redemptive violence.” It's the story we keep rehearsing as a nation—that force saves, that the only way to stop harm is to inflict harm. It's in our movies, our politics, our video games, even our churches at times. And it is a lie.

A lot of us can relate to my colleague Derek Penwell who wrote this on Thursday:

Here's my confession: I've been socialized by the myth (of redemptive violence) too. I've felt the twitch of satisfaction when “our side” lands a punch. I've imagined safety as the ability to overpower, not the courage to reconcile. I carry this reflex in my bones. I'm an angry man.

This myth has shaped within me the subtle instinct to believe that harm can somehow heal, that a wound in the “right” direction, if I squint hard enough, might somehow be holy. That instinct is a lie I’m struggling to unlearn.

Because violence does not redeem. It only multiplies. It may create breathing space for a time, but it abides by Newton’s Third Law of Motion, “Every action has an equal but opposite reaction.”

So if we start to gloat when our “enemy” falls, then we have been co-opted by the very forces we claim to resist.

It is in a context such as this that the Prophet Joel says:

When devastation hits, gather everyone. Come together. Don’t scatter. Don’t turn against each other. Come back to God, and to one another.

And then Jesus tells a parable about what happens when the community gathers: lost things are found.

A shepherd loses one sheep. He goes searching, leaving the 99.
A woman loses one coin. She sweeps the house until she finds it.
Each ends with rejoicing: “Rejoice with me! For what was lost is found.”

And here’s what I notice: it isn’t just about finding the lost. It’s about the community learning to rejoice when things are put right. The whole neighborhood is called in for the party.

When we gather—when we refuse to let despair or violence scatter us—God creates space for restoration. Lost things come home. New joy erupts. The circle grows wider.

This is ReUnion Sunday. And I wonder: what would it look like for us to believe that God still works this way? To believe that the antidote to the myth of redemptive violence is the truth of redemptive community. That the way forward isn’t striking harder blows, but practicing deeper belonging. That kindness matters. Crossing boundaries matters. Hope matters.

Our own Conference Minister, Franz Rigert, reminds us of some very practical ways we can embody this truth:

First, we can bear witness to the Gospel of love in little ways every day, remembering that kindness can be contagious.
Second, we can muster the courage to step over some invisible boundaries.
Third, we can hope.
Finally, we can keep sharing our values with passion and conviction.

Rigert goes on:

Often, I'm tempted to rant against people who see the world differently than I do, but the truth is I find it way more effective to tell them what I believe: I believe in neighborly love, full inclusion, grace that fosters forgiveness, relief for the poor and healing for the broken, justice and generosity for all.

Friends, that's our call too. To actually put into practice what God is dreaming—a world where enemies are reconciled, where children are safe, where neighbors are fed, where the lonely are welcomed, where violence doesn't have the last word.

That's why we're here today. Not just to kick off another year of programs, but to practice being that community. To bless our children and youth and teachers and everyone who supports learning and growth as they head back to school—not with fear, but with love, courage, and belonging. To send them out as seed-sowers of kindness and peace. To remind each other that we, too, are seeds in God's hands—planted in this city, in this nation, for the sake of healing and hope.

So yes, the locusts have eaten much. Yes, violence and despair still prowl. But if we are genuinely to follow Jesus, we won't "express our rage with bullets or vengeance. We express our rage with the audacity to dream of a different world."

So hear the prophet's call: Gather the people. Come together. Return to God. Believe in abundance when the world cries scarcity. Practice joy when the world rehearses despair.

And hear Jesus' promise: What is lost will be found. What is broken can be healed. And heaven itself will rejoice.

So welcome home, beloved. Welcome to ReUnion Sunday.

- Let's be the people who gather when the world scatters.
- Let's be the people who rejoice when others despair.
- Let's be the people who love when hatred seems easier.
- Let's be the people who practice peace in a culture addicted to violence.
- Let's be the people who live as though God's dream is already taking root— here, now, in us.

Because it is. Because of you. Because of God. Alleluia and Amen.

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Joel 2:12-16, Luke 15:1-10
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