

GOD GIVES PEACE IN THE MIDST OF FEAR

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

But for all of you, the ones fearing My Name, (the) Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings, then all of you will be released and leap as calves released from (their) bonds.

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The second week of Advent is one which has traditionally brought the themes of hope and peace, (the names given to the first two purple candles on the Advent Wreath) into the ears of the hearers of the Word. It is also when God calls us to faithful watching, in His Word, for the coming of the one who would bear the spirit of prophecy. That prophecy would lead many, by God's grace, to hear that God gives you His peace as you watch in sure and certain hope and peace to behold the signs of the coming of the Christ.

Traditionally the second Sunday in the season of penitential reflection and muted joy we call Advent, is when the Church anticipates the final coming of our Savior in our flesh. Today's readings are a way, even as we anticipate His first enfleshed coming, to behold the ultimate end of God's work in this fallen creation. Today's readings echo those of the last Sundays of the Church Year. Those days' readings also encouraged you to faithful watching and waiting for the signs of the Day of the Lord. Thus with the connection to the old year in mind, today's Word declares:

Therefore, behold, the day of (the) Lord comes, and burns as an oven. And all the arrogant, and all the ones doing lawlessness, will be chaff, and they will be set ablaze in the

coming day, says the Lord Almighty, for there will definitely not be anything left remaining out of them, neither root nor branch.

Less than three weeks before the Church will again declare the Christ coming as a baby, the Word of God declares how His final coming will look. That Day burns with God's pure wrath at sin. It has been prepared to consume sin, and unrepentant sinners – that those who hear of its coming might turn from their sins and be saved.

When you reflect on the manger realities to be declared later this year, when you see the scenes of the Infant in the cattle trough, remember that is how He did come. The fulfilled reality of the manger brings God's assurance that that which you are hearing of today will also come. It will be a Day of cleansing fire, a Day of concentrated heat and flame as in a smelting oven. It is even now being fired to burn off all impurities of sin from this fallen creation. For those who do not have Christ-crucified at the center of their lives, who have rejected the forgiveness that He continues to bring to sinners, it will be a Day of terror and fire. God's wrath is a cleansing fire, burning away all sin, and sinners, from the eternal presence of the Holy – that is, from God, and all you who bear His Name. The fire described by Malachi burns much hotter than any fire you can experience in this fallen world. This fallen Creation's final day of purification will come in a rush. On that Day of fiery cleansing, all who continue to do lawlessness – who have rejected the Good News of Jesus' death to bring forgiveness to sinners – will be set ablaze eternally. That is for the lawless. What then will come on the Last Day for you who turn

repeatedly to God in repentance for your sins, trusting in Jesus the Christ to have paid for all your lawlessness? The prophet declares;

But for all of you, the ones fearing My Name, (the) Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings, then all of you will be released and leap as calves released from (their) bonds.

Those words speak to you who believe God's promises – all of them from the Day of Fire to the Day of Forgiveness. With them, God gives peace in the midst of fear. They declare a title, "Sun of Righteousness," for a Person who will rise with healing flowing from Him. Who is this "Sun of Righteousness?"

He is none other than Jesus, the Christ. He came to become one with us sinners. He came in the flesh to bear our sins away, to save us from the burning wrath of the coming Judgment Day. If you thought, when you heard the title, that the "Sun of Righteousness" is Jesus, you are in good company. The earliest Christian teachers of the Faith held that the Christ Jesus is the "Sun of Righteousness" promised by Malachi. The warmth of His sin-healing radiant fire, as rays of the sun (poetically described as "His wings" in today's texts), shine even now through the proclamation of His Word over this world which so long sat in darkness, in the shadow cast by death which was brought into this creation by the first man in his sin.

For the faithful, the rays of the Sun of Righteousness, His Word proclaimed, bring healing – true healing, a mending of the fatal flaw which separates man from God. Real healing comes to that which infects us to the core – sin, inherited from Adam and added to in us daily. Much as the sun's setting rays this day turned back the darkness

and warmed the day, so too, do the rays of the Sun of Righteousness warm sin-darkened, cold hearts. When the Word strikes the ears of sinners who desire to turn from their sins, healing is given. Yet, even as the night has fallen with its cold, so too, sin creeps back into our lives. As the desert life needs the sun's rays to sustain it, so do our lives need the Son's rays – His Word of Forgiveness – to sustain our eternal lives. His Word is given to warm your hearts to move you to, *be released and leap as calves released from (their) bonds.*

If you have ever had a pet, and kept it in a kennel in your home while you were away, you know of the joy of which the prophet speaks. Such caged animals hear your arrival. They have been “watching for the signs of your coming:” listening for the car in the drive; the key in the lock; the sound of your footsteps. They excitedly nudge the door of their crate, yearning to break free. When loosed, they run for joy!

That is the joy that is coming for you, that joy which will be foretold in next week's theme symbolized by the rose candle. Even so, you are free today to find hope and peace in watching for The Day of the Lord that is coming. You have heard Him approach – in His Word. You have strained against the cage door of sin, sniffing for the scent of His arrival – the smell of unleavened bread and communion wine. You leap in spirit, even if you physically are unable to jump for joy, when He touches you, once again freeing you from the bonds of sin.

You have been given the Son of Righteousness. His Word goes forth to bring you to the Day of final freedom, from sin and all its effects. On that Day, God's mercy for you, and His justice for the unrepentant will be fully displayed to all creation. You have

heard Malachi's imagery which is given to describe your thoughts, emotions, and actions on the day of the Son. His light even now shines on you through the proclamation of the Good News of Christ's death for your sins; His resurrection for your justification before the Father; and His ascension which assures that you too will, on that Last Day, be bodily raised to rule with Him. As you watch for that day in the hope of Christ, in the peace of His blood-bought forgiveness, God gives you even more promises:

Then you will trample (the) lawless ones underfoot, therefore they will be below your feet, in the day I make, says (the) Lord Almighty.

Those who remain outside God's Law that shows us our sin, and our need for the Savior will have an unending Last Day experience that will be far different than that which is prepared for you who remain repentant sinners. You who hear and believe the Good News of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins will be lifted above all God's burning fiery wrath to come. He promises that you will, for eternity, stand over all those who have rejected His grace and mercy in Christ Jesus.

That should bring you some peace when you hear of our Christian freedom being taken away - whether it be in the courthouse, in the city square, or in the workplace or schoolhouse. You have nothing to fear of the coming Last Day when such wrongs, and all sin, will be burned away. Each day, as you are returned to the death and resurrection of Jesus through your baptisms, the Lord burns off from you the impurities of sin, the devil, and the world. The Holy Spirit cleanses you from sin, even as you are daily declared pure by the fire of God - His Law that shows you your sin, and His

Gospel which declares to you your Savior. God burns away your sin through simple means. He gives His Word to call you to new life: to find hope and peace in His Holy gifts as you watch and wait for the Savior whose first Advent was heralded by His Word. God speaks to you this day of the means He has given to preserve you through the coming fire of His wrath:

All of you remember (the) Torah of Moses My slave, just as therefore I commanded statutes and judgments to Him in Horeb toward all Israel.

That sentence is declared to encourage you to remain in the Word of God even as you are watching for His coming. The Torah, the Law and Gospel handed to the people of God through Moses, was given to the faithful in ancient times to keep them until the Day of the Lord began. The Word of the Old Testament preserved the faithful until the day when God came in our flesh to be our Savior.

So, while you have been freed from the coming fire -- your sins are daily cleansed from you by the Good News of Jesus -- you too are still to hold to the entire Word that God has given. You do so by clinging to Christ in the Faith, to Him who has kept that Word perfectly for you. That you might remember that was always so for the faithful, that God keeps His Word even though time seems to rush away, God has said that not even the smallest part of His Word will pass away. How then, as you wait in the Word of God, will you know when this time of God's Gospel and Law, His healing and consuming fire, this time of watching in hope and peace are here? The prophet declares:

And behold, I send to all of you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and dreadful day of (the) Lord comes...

God has done that: He has sent the one on whom the spirit of Elijah rested. He, by the testimony of parallel biblical texts, was not a reincarnation of the long-gone Elijah of the Old Testament. He has already preached the fire which called people to confess their sins, to begin to walk in repentance, to yearn to hear of their Savior. The Last Day has begun! Elijah, who prophesied in a time of great Israelite falling from the faith, who called the faithful to repentance, is the model God which gave to show how to recognize the prophet who would come before the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. This Elijah who was to come for the ancient faithful in their watching, has come before us who now watch in the Faith, is one who

will turn the hearts of fathers toward sons, and hearts of sons toward their fathers: lest I come and beat the earth with (a) curse.

That prophet's call results in the turning of hearts. No longer would fathers be ashamed of their sons in the Faith, nor the sons of their fathers in the Faith. All the faithful will repent, and return to the faith of our fathers who believed the Word of God. They, we, you, will daily turn from our sins, and believe in the Son who has come to declare us right with the Father. In a real way, this Advent Day of hope and peace in watching, according to Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, is a day to wait for the advent of the one who comes before the Lord. We have an Advent in Advent, a waiting to hear of the messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord! The prophet Malachi still declares:

And behold, I send to all of you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and dreadful day of (the) Lord comes, who will turn the hearts of fathers toward sons, and hearts of sons toward their fathers: lest I come and beat the earth with (a) curse.

The season of watching and waiting has come to a traditional marker set before the end. Soon our watching to behold the work of the Lord, our hope and peace as we anticipate the Joy of God's appearance in our flesh will be over. God has shown through the ancient readings of the Church that He gives a lot of time for people to know their sins, to sorrow over them, and to will to turn from them before He acts in sending His promised final fire. From the time of the Words quoted here today, over 400 years elapsed before they were fulfilled. I promise, if the Last Day does not come before the end of next Sunday's services, You will have opportunity to hear more of the prophet in the Office of Elijah; of his message of repentance into the forgiveness of sins, and his confession of Christ.

Until then, we can take heart in God's patience, in His acting throughout history. We can learn from the faithful of old to watch and wait for Christ's coming in glory. After all, we are watchers in the time when the Christ has come for a time bodily into this fallen creation. He even now comes regularly in His Word and Sacraments. In His regular arrivals, you are free to watch for His final coming in hope and peace.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent II (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)

Malachi 4:1-6; Romans 15:4-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 9, 2012

Pastor Michael H. Merchonise

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Translation, second draft:

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