

IN NOMINE JESU

GOD'S LAST WILL AND OLD TESTAMENT WORDS

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

Hear the Word of the Lord for second Sunday of the Advent of our God, declared to those whom the ancient Christians began to call the, “City of Zion:”

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. ¹

We have entered the part of this short penitential season wherein we who have been watching for the coming of Jesus to save now, are called into preparing for that Last Day. The readings this day are full of prophecies of the coming fire... and of the mercy of God. His grace is declared, even in judgement texts, to those who continue to hear His Word, will to turn from their sins, and, in His blood-bought forgiveness, desire to walk in newness of life. God's grace and mercy is for you who, hearing His Word with penitent and contrite hearts, believe He has done all that is necessary – in time and in eternity – for you to be among those who rejoice in His coming. Just so, your reaction on the Last Day is pictured with these words:

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. ²

You may know that you are one who fears God's Name rightly whenever you recall the meaning of the First Commandment. This fear is the awful, awe-filled, terror of one who knows his or her sinfulness as she or he is in the presence of the holy God. It is the awesome, joy-filled trembling that comes from knowing that, in Christ, you have been declared holy, fit to remain in the presence of the holy God.

¹ Malachi 3:20 MT

² Malachi 3:20 MT

To effect that, you have been, and continue to be, given the Holy Spirit. That Spirit living in you works through God's Word to convict and acquit, to condemn and atone, to kill and to enliven the person of the Faith. That Spirit ever points you to the Christ of the Scriptures.

That Christ has come – to save as last week's Hosanna's demanded. He comes – to bring forgiveness to you who have sinned through His Word and Sacraments. He will come again – to release you forever from sin and death's defeated grasp. That is all for you who continue to hear the Word with good and faithful hearts – who live lives of confession and absolution, repentance and forgiveness.

But for those who continue to reject God's conviction, condemnation, and execution of their old natures, and/or those who continue to reject God's acquittal, atonement and daily resurrection of their new natures, there is something else coming. That is too horrible to imagine, for it brings eternal condemnation, just judgement and separation from the Author of Life and Light. The closing words of Malachi, literally, "My Messenger," began like this today in our ears:

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.³

That word of preparation is for those outside God's Church, most certainly. It is also for our old natures, those thoughts, words and deeds which still cling to us from our father Adam. That Old Adam wills us to be gods in ourselves.

The week's text is also a reminder that the God who is unseen, may be beheld under earthly elements for the protection of the faithful. The burning day is described

³ Malachi 3:19 MT

in our text as a hot oven. When these words were recorded, Kenmore, Fridigidare and the like were known only to God. The word inspired and translated, oven, was not like our contemporary kitchen appliances. It would have been that which was built, or carried, by a nomadic people. Our Wednesday morning Bible study, the Markanites among us, have seen pictures and heard detailed descriptions of such mud constructed ovens. They were not made by Coleman, but by each household. They were used for a time and rebuilt as the people moved on.

Also, such an oven pictured could have been one of the small fire pots easily carried amidst the portable cooking utensils of people wandering to receive the land God had promised to them. It is such a fire pot that God used when He cut His covenant of grace with Abraham, the father of all believers. Then, God caused the burning portable oven to allow Abraham to remain in His glorious presence while God ratified His testament of grace.

The Word uses such imagery today to continue to declare that the day of the Lord that is coming is one in which His fiery Presence will be among people. We have already heard what that day will be like for us who remain clothed in the light of Christ. Now, we hear of what it shall be for those who desire to remain in their evil, who will to make themselves gods before the Living God. Remember, the text says, *all the arrogant, and all the ones doing lawlessness, will be chaff, and they will be set ablaze in the coming day...*

God's cleansing fire will separate those who are of the light from those who desire to remain in darkness. When this text was first declared, about 430 B.C., the people of the Lord who had been returned by God through human agency to the Promised Land had returned to the sins of their forefathers. God had allowed them, in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, into the rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Just a short time after their trowels and swords had been laid down, they had begun again cheating on God's covenant of grace.

Oh, they had started up the sacrificial system again once the Temple was rebuilt and consecrated. Yet, they who were in the Church began to withhold from God that which they had agreed, by covenant, to give back to Him. Priests and people alike were cheating on their offerings and tithes. They began, again as did their forefathers, to give the worst of their flocks for the sacrifices. They were keeping the best for themselves – and showing their lack of trust in God to replace their best.

The priests were not guarding, treasuring and proclaiming the pure word of God. They were affirming people in their sins. They were declaring that which God had told them to be evil to be good in His sight. (Can you think of any parallels in the churches of our day)? God had declared that their unfaithfulness was most clearly displayed in their lack of fidelity toward the wives of their youth.

All of that and more is enumerated in Malachi's book. That little work, in just 55 verses, uses 22 rhetorical questions to condemn such practices. God was about to seal up prophecy for four and a half centuries, and the people worshipping God in half-hearted and unfaithful gifts, were being warned and prepared for the dearth of the Word that was coming to them. Can you behold a pattern that has been enacted repeatedly in the Church when God's people turn from trusting in Him, from giving to Him that which is His in the sure and certain hope that He will give them more than they can ever ask or even receive?

We, you, are being called to be watchful and prepared, as most of the ancients in the Church were not. You, we, are being called to fidelity to God, to His Word, to His gifts, and to respond to them in His Faith. God is faithful, and desires to remain among

the people whom He has named, “Faithful.” He even tells you how this may be done as He still says some 2,450 years after Malachi’s prophecy was recorded:

*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.*⁴

God ever calls His covenantal people – Old and New alike – to remember His Torah. That is, in the wide sense, the first five books of the Bible (Genesis through Deuteronomy). In the narrow sense, the word describes God’s Law and Gospel in those opening books concerning sin and salvation’s eternal narrative. You may know the Torah well, for it is represented before you every time you face the East in this Nave. There, on two stone tablets are engraved words that describe the love of God and the love of neighbor to which you continue to be called. Above them hangs a reminder of the price God paid to grant you such love, His love.

Flanking those earthly images are icons that depict God’s love for those who transgress His Torah, and yet still will to turn from their sins. They are placed to indicate that, while you are watching and preparing for the Christ-once-crucified for your sins to return on the clouds with glory, you are free to remain in His Word and respond with your first-fruit gifts in full trust that He will continue to provide for all your needs of body and life. You may know that is so, because, as this season leads into the next two, you will hear of God’s fulfilling this promise some four and a half centuries after He gave it to an unfaithful majority and a faithful minority:

*And behold, I send to all of you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and dreadful day of (the) Lord comes...*⁵

You who annually hear God’s Word in Advent, Christmas and Epiphany, know that the Elijah to come came in the person of John the Baptizing One. He came and

⁴ Malachi 3:22 MT

⁵ Malachi 3:23 MT.

prepared the way. Those who were watching were prepared, though not as well as you. After all, you have the whole story – of the Christ Who came, the Christ Who still comes veiled with the Word under water, bread, and wine. And, you have the closing words of the Old Covenant prophecy, God’s Last Will and Testament for those generations, which still declares of Himself:

He will cause to turn the hearts of fathers toward sons, and (the) hearts of sons toward their fathers: lest I come and beat the earth with (a) curse.⁶

The closing word of the Old Covenant narrative is one that may be translated as you just heard it, “curse.” It may be rendered, “decree of utter destruction.” It indicates that which was once devoted to the worship of pagan gods which was to be given over to total and complete annihilation.

It is pure Torah, which in its promise to remove all things hostile to God’s rule, brings comfort to those who desire to live in Him. For, once the lawless things are removed from the presence of the faithful, there is only the pure left in which to live. You who are watchful and prepared in the Good News of Jesus Christ are ready for that great and terrible day. In His Word, you find the peace that is promised this week to all who believe.

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

Advent II, Populus Zion (LSB one-year series)

Psalm 50:1-15; Psalm 80 (v.1, Isaiah 30:19, 30); Malachi 3:19-24 MT; Romans 15:4-13; Luke 21:24-36

December 4, 2016

Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

Solū Deo Glōria

⁶ Malachi 3:24 MT.