

Advent 2C: Malachi 3:1-7-

“I will send my messenger...I am sending you”

1. The days of our OT lesson probably seemed like any other to Israelites of time, nothing special
 - a. It'd been nearly 100 years since they came back from exile in Babylon
 - i. What glorious days those had been, there were such great expectations of what would be now that they were back, but alas reality didn't live up to the dreams.
 - ii. The new temple that had been built on the ruins of Solomon's was a poor copy of the original
 - iii. And God hadn't returned to the Temple as He was before the exile - the glory of His presence no longer sat above the ark – in fact there was no ark!
 - iv. Israel hadn't been restored as a great kingdom
 - b. Caught up in the general malaise of the time people took a spiritual sabbatical
 - i. Temple giving was down and the temple had quickly fallen into disrepair
 - ii. Many no longer felt it necessary to give God their first fruits, “He'd be satisfied with the maimed and disfigured of the herd – He was merciful after all.”
 - iii. The priests no longer felt it necessary to marry daughters of Israel, “weren't the surrounding pagan women more beautiful – God wouldn't care about that old law besides He was merciful after all.”
2. Then along came Malachi preaching as all prophets do...the full sternness and full sweetness of God's counsel, Mal 1:1 **“The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi...”**
 - a. **“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them...“You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?” (Mal 3:7,14)**
 - i. Like a hot knife on an open wound, his message hurt but it's meant to be curative – to staunch the spiritual blood loss.
 - ii. His words were not his own, they were the Lord's, he wasn't sent to speak about God but FOR God
 - iii. As God says through him today, **“Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” (Mal 3:1)**
 - b. In Hebrew the word Malachi means “My messenger”
 - i. We don't know if it's a title or if it's actually the name of the prophet
 - ii. Several prophets have been called “messenger”, **“Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message...”**
 - iii. Malachi's message the same as all prophets, **“Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.”** – that is REPENT! (Mal 3:7)

- iv. Repent and wait for the Lord because He is gracious and forgiving, **a savior**. His message was meant to kill (repentance)... and to heal (forgiveness)
 - c. Malachi was the last of the prophets before the long silence, 400 years without the voice of the Lord before the birth of Christ
 - i. Nothing more needed to be said, the Word had been given time and again, Isa 7:14, **“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”**
 - ii. Malachi called Israel to live in faithful expectation of that promise’s fulfillment, and to look for the final messenger before the coming Messiah
 - iii. But after Malachi the long years stretched out without a new Word from the Lord and the people again forgot the God they served.
 - iv. Kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell, Israel’s destiny was tied to the major superpowers that surrounded her, better “to go along to get along” rather than rebel
- 3. The people wearied and grew careless waiting for the Lord
 - a. Then once again another Malachi (remember the word means “my messenger”) John the Baptist suddenly appeared heralding the return of the Lord to His temple
 - i. We hear in our Gospel, **“In the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar...the Word of God came to John son of Zechariah...the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”** (Lk 3:2)
 - ii. Like all prophets before him his words weren’t his own; He wasn’t sent to speak about God, but for God.
 - iii. He brought the full sternness of His counsel, **“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come...Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”** (Lk 3:7-8)
 - b. And his message hit home, **“the crowds asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’** (Lk 3:10)
 - i. That’s the purpose of God’s Law it cuts to the quick...leaves no room for false pretense of piety...it is the great leveler...it calls for repentance
 - ii. But John’s message was also Gospel – there is no Law without Gospel, God is a God of salvation not condemnation.
 - iii. John’s ministry was about the forgiveness of sins and returning to the Lord, **“And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”** (Lk 3:3)
 - iv. Ultimately, he would direct the crowd’s attention to One Who had finally come, **“Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”** (Jn 1:29)
- 4. Now today, long years have again passed since our Lord last spoke and many have wearied and grown careless while waiting for His return

- a. But Malachi still preaches – “my messenger” is the Church who prepares the way of the Lord
 - i. Of course, we know that Pastors have been given that charge laid on Malachi to prepare the way by regular, public proclamation of Word.
 - ii. But unlike the days of Malachi the whole Church, is now included in that mission of preparation.
- b. Listen to verse 3 of our reading, **“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi (PRIESTS) and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.”** (Mal 3:3)
 - i. The priestly class in OT Israel was an inherited position, held by descendants of Levi, but in the church, there is no inherited priestly class.
 - ii. Rather we all share the priesthood as Peter says in 1Pe 2:9, **“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”**
 - iii. By virtue of baptism, we not only receive Christ’s righteousness but also share in His Priesthood.
 - iv. God has refined and purified us to take the place of OT priests
- c. Thus, in the church pastors are called to carry out those functions on behalf of the congregation publicly
 - i. But in everyday life as God’s people go about their tasks and vocations into which the Lord has placed them, they also bear witness
 - ii. You are Malachis (God’s messenger) to the Hope that’s in you.
 - iii. Your words are not your own, they are the Lord’s calling people to hope in Christ.
- d. That is the message that we bear to the world during this Advent season as we await His birth in Bethlehem and His coming again on the Last Day.
 - i. The Church and her people continue to prepare the way for His arrival through the promise of His Word.
 - ii. Repent, that is trust in God’s promise that all of our sins have been laid on Christ and crucified with Him on His cross.
 - iii. That now through faith we can approach God without fear for heaven and earth have been reunited by the cross and eternal life is open to all who believe in Jesus Christ and His Gospel
 - iv. This Advent season recognize that the Lord still speaks saying, **“I will send my messenger...I’m sending you.”**