

Second Sunday in Advent

December 6, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Malachi 3:1-4

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.
(NIV)

When we were growing up every Christmas my parents would give just one of us five children a "special" gift. My brothers and sister and I did not know who was getting it but we knew it was coming. Most years it would be in one of our stockings but a couple times my parents wrapped it up and placed it under the tree. Every year without fail one of us would get the gift of coal. Yes, several times this gift brought tears with it. We understood what it meant. Coal is not a good thing to get at Christmas. It means you have not always been nice. It meant we were on my parent's naughty list. It meant some ribbing from our other siblings. Personally, I think my parents just used this fear of getting the coal every year to try to get us to listen more and behave better as we got closer to Christmas.

We are getting closer and closer to another Christmas again. What are you doing to prepare? I doubt many of you have been out shopping for coal to give to your loved ones. Yet, our God of love has a couple of special gifts to prepare us. One is a fire, called a '*refiner's fire*.' He wants to burn away all that is impure from us - even if that means putting us into the fire. Another is soap, referred to here as "*a launderer's soap*." God wants to wash us completely clean - even if it means getting out the old-ribbed-washboard and heavy soap to use on us. Every year without fail at this time of year we know it is coming. John the Baptist is ready and waiting for us with a message of repentance. I hope it comes with some tears from us too - if not on the outside at least on the inside. Listen in this Advent season, as the Lord, in His grace, sends us two messengers. One is sent to prepare us. The other is sent to repair us. So marvel how the Lord: **Prepares us to be repaired.**

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi is also the last Old Testament prophet to speak for the Lord. The next prophet of God will not come for another 400 years. Malachi points us ahead to his coming. "*See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.*" In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke these words are all quoted to refer to John the Baptist. Jesus himself quoted these words in pointing to John. John the Baptist would have the job of preparing the way for the Lord. How will John do this? He will really continue to carry on the same work Malachi was doing here 400 years earlier.

What Malachi did was preach the law to show the people their sin. Their hearts were unclean. They were not living the right way. They were doing evil and blaming God because things were not going their way. They complained that the wicked were prospering. Even the priests and Levites who were to be spiritual leaders were grumbling against God. They brought in defected sacrifices and taught falsely. They were going through the motions and

were lazy. So Malachi tells the spiritual leaders to stop sitting on their hands and to do something. Malachi scolds the people who were complaining to God. God was not ripping them off – they were robbing God. They robbed him with their selfish offerings. They were not bringing their tithes to the Lord to support His work. If they had been they would have had more blessings from God than they could store. Instead of in faith bringing in generous gifts of love to the Lord they brought Him complaints and excuses. In the verse before our text Malachi says: ***“You have wearied the Lord with your words.”***

Is this not the same message John the Baptist tells the people, tells us? Repent! Do you see what your heart looks like before God? It is full of evil. It is lazy. It is selfish. Have you served the Lord faithfully this last year and given Him your all? I very much doubt it. Are we bringing to the Lord our best offerings and most generous gifts? What about when things don't go our way? Do we blame God? Do we ever weary the Lord with our words? Do we dishonor our God with our actions?

Now do we understand why the Lord sends John the Baptist? He says: ***“You brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”*** In Malachi here we are asked: ***“But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?”*** The answer is: not me! Not you! This is what the one who prepares the way does. He shows us how sad, how sorry, how sinful we are. We are unholy. We are unclean. You and I have disobeyed and dishonored our Creator with our sins and rightly deserve His punishment. There is no escape. There is no way out. His wrath is coming like a consuming fire. All who are not holy will be thrown into it. Now this is a reason for real tears.

So do you see your sin? Do you see your helplessness? Do you recognize what you have done and what you deserve? Then you are prepared. Then God's messenger did his job. When we are prepared: ***“then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.*** The first messenger the Lord called “my messenger.” We know this messenger is John the Baptist and his work is important. But there is something much different about this second messenger. Did you catch it? The Lord will come to His temple. This messenger will be the Lord Himself. The word messenger here is also a little different than the first word translated messenger too. The second word is not just one who carries a message but one who is used to carry out a special commission as well. In other places it is translated “angel.”

Who is this “angel of the covenant”? Who is this whom we have desired? It is the same angel of the Lord that led Israel out of Egypt as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This is the same angel of the Lord who encouraged a despairing Elijah. This is angel of the Lord God threatened to remove from Israel when they worshipped the golden calf. The Lord said instead He would send a created angel. But Moses pleaded for the angel of the Lord to lead them to the Promised Land and cried that they could not make it without His presence. This is the Lord Himself who will come to us. Do you understand whom Malachi is talking about now? This is Immanuel – God with us. This second messenger is Jesus Christ!

What will Jesus do? What did Jesus do? He came not to destroy us but to purge us. He came not to crush us but to cleanse us. He came to provide us with holiness. He came to take away our sin. He came to bear our guilt and suffer our punishment. He came to die on a cross and triumph over the grave. He came to repair us. Now we come through the fire of His love and all our impurities are gone for the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. Now

we are clean because Jesus' blood has washed our sins away. We are able to say with David that we are whiter than snow. Now do you see why Jesus Christ, the messenger of the covenant, is the one "*whom you desire?*" "*He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.*"

Now that Jesus has refined and purified us do you know what this means? We are able to bring Him real offerings. We are able to live for Him and serve and worship Him. We come in faith to lay our best gifts before Him. The Lord won't be wearied by them but will welcome them all. "*Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.*" So this Christmas let's bring Him our thanks, and praise, and worship, and offerings. For our Savior has come! He has repaired us.

So what are you doing to prepare? I have to admit that my siblings and I didn't care much for seeing coal as one of our gifts for Christmas. And I'm not going to tell you which of us five children received it the most. Yet, in a way that coal was a good reminder for Christmas. It was a reminder of our sin. It is a reminder each of us needs in order to be prepared. Then we realize the best gift of all every Christmas is not some gift wrapped under the tree, but the Gift that was laid into the manger. For "*the Lord you are seeking (came) to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, (has) come!*" Now we have been repaired and are prepared for Him to come again. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.