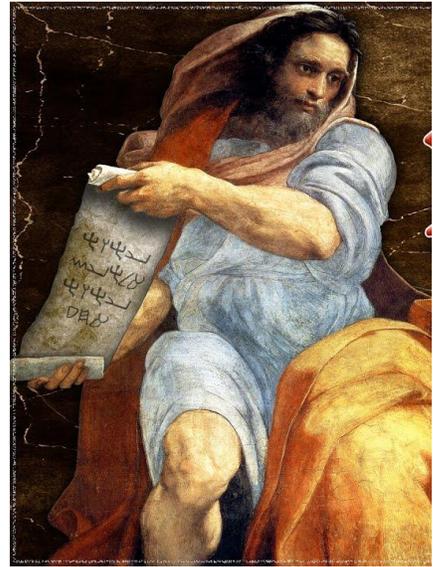


Our first lesson today is one of those “be careful what you wish for” stories. The people in Malachi’s day were returned to their land, were returned to their Temple. They had miraculously been let go (ransomed, redeemed, restored, even). And yet, the people were seriously unhappy. THIS wasn’t what they had dreamed of, wasn’t what they had envisioned. They were back in Judah, back in their rebuilt Temple (with acoustics that work), and yet they weren’t “home.” Nothing was the same as in the past.

Malachi lived about 500 years before Christ came among us in person. We don’t know who Malachi was, except a prophet, “God’s messenger.” That’s what Malachi means, “God’s messenger.” His only identity was to share messages from God, to share the Word of God.



We consider Malachi a minor prophet because the words he shared from God lack the soaring majesty of the prophets we like best: Isaiah and Jeremiah, for example. Instead, Malachi is given more a mundane, more plebian message:

- “Stop bickering among yourselves,” Malachi told his people.
- “Holy up!” Malachi chided his priests.
- “The Messiah is coming!” we are to understand.

That’s Malachi’s message, his God-given Word, for the people so long ago. That’s Malachi’s message, his God-given Word, for us today. The Messiah is coming—live as if he were already here:

- Prepare your hearts!
- Make way, make room!
- Dust the corners of your life; sweep the Temple!
- Prepare the way of the Lord!

But, be careful what you wish for. When the Messiah comes, Malachi says, there is great rejoicing, yes! But, the coming of the Lord requires preparation, requires internal housekeeping, requires our attention. Don’t you know, we are the raw material, the ore, that needs purifying before God makes metal of us, firms us up, so we can be with him?

This is why God needs a messenger. A big visit requires great preparation, especially if we haven’t been paying close attention in a while. Prepare ye the way of the Lord!

How? You have your word, the one Rev. Guimond asked you to write last week, to write on a little card and carry with you. Your word is the one thing you said you needed to work on this Advent, the one thing you think you need to change his season. You've carried your word with you this week, literally. But we know, you and I, we know this word has taken over your life. That's why you chose this word, why you vowed to do something about your word this Advent. The Messiah is coming, and this word is occupying Christ's space in your life and in your heart. Your task is to prepare the way of the Lord by moving this word aside to give the Christ-child room.

That's not "how," is it? I've told you "why" you need to tend to your word. Here's how: Give your word to Jesus each morning and ask Christ to replace this particular word with love: love for yourself, love for all. And then ask Christ Jesus to send you a messenger, a person to remind you that day to exchange your word for God's Word, which is LOVE. Soon (I guarantee this) you will get a chance to practice giving your troublesome little word over to God's Word, which of course is LOVE. At the end of each day, take stock, forgive yourself when necessary and clutch love closer for use tomorrow. This is how we, with God's help, will change our own little word into God's Word, how we will experience God's Kingdom right here and now.



Preparing for the Lord's coming is hard work, though. Maybe the reason we think Malachi so minor a prophet is he doesn't pronounce answers. "What kind of prophet is Malachi—don't prophets prescribe?" Not Malachi. Instead, he asks questions of us.

Malachi asks, "Who can endure the coming of the Lord?" Malachi doesn't ask this to make us feel guilty. Malachi knows we are already guilt-filled, and God knows why: We feel guilty because we ARE GUILTY; we fill up God's space with our stuff, we exchange God's Word for our word. And, like children on a sugar-cereal and pizza diet, rather than repenting and exchanging our hope-less existence for a joyous life, we say, "Woe is me." After a while we begin to blame God. And finally, we decide, "Life would be easier if we just embraced our own word instead of God's Word."

We are so lost in darkness; how lost are we? We say, "climate change," for example, and then blame each other when we disagree about it. We are so ill in God-forsakenness that we see evil in the other, forgetting the other is us. This is why Jesus is born among us anew each year. Otherwise, we would forget to wait, forget to hope. Get ready: God's Word is coming, and he is hope itself, hope, peace, joy, AND love, all bound up on one.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord!