

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Reverend Dr. Daris Bultena

December 6, 2009
2nd Sunday of Advent

Malachi 3:1-4

¹See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight — indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Luke 3:1-6

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;

⁶and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'

“A Flicker of Starlight Peace”

**When you close them real tight what do you see? When you close
your eyes real tight...when you push your closed eyes back into your**

head...oh, do you see it? Do you see that flicker of starlight? That flash, that flutter, that flicker—it is there. Do you see it?

A flicker of starlight—painted on the eyelid, burned into the brain, seared on the vision!

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I know that she thought she was alone in the main corridor, but I could see her there. She had gone from the classroom to the bathroom. She had been sent back to the classroom, but before making the turn to go down the hallway to the classroom she made her way down the main corridor. I was standing in the narthex and could see her.

She, all of four years old, she floated—it was not walking, it was not quite yet a run—it was more of a floating. I hear it all the time with children that are in this building all day long—I hear them calling out to children, “Don’t run.” I do not say that anymore. I may say, “slow down” or possibly even, “watch it.” “Don’t run,” well now, that I no longer say.

It has become clearer and clearer to me that among them—among the between 60 and 80 children we see daily—there are few walkers. There is so much energy in those little bodies of theirs that hardly is there a walker among them. I think we ask too much when we ask them to harness that energy into the slow pace of post-mid life that the rest of us move.

Perhaps the real issue is our jealousy. We wish we had that pep, that zest of step—most of us no longer put forth the effort or even have the effort at all to run at all. I know I find it easier to increase the duration of my fast walking on that treadmill than I do the run. Oh, I’m better at running my mouth than my legs!

Yes, I saw her—and it took a minute for her to notice me as she floated up the main corridor. She flitzed back and forth as she made her way. She was carefree, happy, full of life, dancing into the light that was pouring in through the windows. As she approached she whirled around and before I could speak she pointed towards my study and announced, “Hey you are supposed to be in there!”

I came back with the question, “And where are you supposed to be?” My question received only giggles as she twirled and flizzed and flounced her way back down the main corridor and into the hallway that leads to the classroom.

Had I asked her to slow down or had I scolded her for her almost running I think I would have missed it. I think I would have missed noticing the full of lifeness incarnation that was part of her being as she floated towards me. I think I could have been so busy making sure that things were ordered in the ways we have been led to think they should be ordered—“children should walk, not run”—oh, had I insisted on that order of things I may have missed the full of lifeness that was her being right in my midst there.

When you push your eyes closed real tight do you see it? Do you see that flicker of starlight? It is there. That flash, that flicker, that flutter...oh, that vision. It is there.

The little book of Malachi—it is last of the “minor” prophets. It is different from the rest. Nothing is known of a Malachi as a person.

Indeed, it really is more of a title than it is a personal name. Literally translated it means, “my messenger.”

The book was written in the period after the Second Temple was dedicated. It clearly has some distance from that as the temple practices have become rote actions performed by priests and people in the rut of doing what they have always done.

Stylistically this book does not fit neatly in the First Testament nor in the New Testament. It is, if you will, between the times. It is between the movements.

Malachi is a book that is a forerunner of messenger John who would come out of the wilderness. Rooted in a firm history and first cousin of the Manger Royal King of Kings-it was John who cried out with the words of Isaiah: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (Luke 3:4-6, Isaiah 40:3-5)

John with his “prepare the way.”

Oh we know about making preparations. We haul those boxes down from the attic or up from the basement. We struggle to get that plastic and wire pre-lit tree from its cartons and up with all those decorations. It is more work than pleasure. It is preparation.

Do we have gifts for all the people we are expected to have gifts for? Of course if you ask us, we do this because we want to, but there is some

ah, well, call it “obligation” there too. We know about preparations. We know well.

And so we schedule our event on the same weekend and the same Friday evening as we did last year because so long as we all do that then the “holiday schedule” will flow with fewer conflicts for those near and dear. Decorate and clean and put a table cloth on almost as if to imply that the dining room table is always clear and ready rather than the mail catch all that it is 11 months of the year.

Ah preparations!

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Preparations for... For what? For Christmas—okay, sure—but its deeper than that. Its more, more than just Christmas—we are preparing ourselves for the day when nation shall not lift up sword against nation. We are preparing ourselves for the days when spears and swords shall be beat into plowshares and pruning hooks. (Isaiah 2:4)

We are preparing ourselves for the days when he shall be named “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” We are preparing ourselves for the days when there will be a level path—clear going—easy getting there to the place of presence of God.

We are preparing ourselves for the days when the mountains that are insurmountable and valleys that are gorged too deep are not obstacles at all. We are preparing ourselves for the days when we are so full of life that we flitz and flounce and twirl with the peace that can only be from God.

Prince of Peace. We are preparing ourselves for the days, for the time, for full of liveness incarnation that will cause us to float rather than the slow pace of walking.

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Dare we admit it that we are not so sure how we get there. We are tired, we are worn out, we have prepared so much that we are ready for nothing. We are preparing ourselves for the days when, as the wild Baptist from the wilderness puts it, “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

We are not so sure when that day and those days will ever come. We are hardly convinced that such is the place where we will end up and where we will land. How long, oh Lord, how long? What kind of refiner’s fire is necessary to get there, where is the fuller’s soap that washes away the impurities and burns off the dross with the power of pure lye?

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“See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way...” Come on Advent people, you know who it is...oh Advent people you know who it is...

It is John. John the Baptist. Yes!

It is Jesus. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Yes!

Yes, for sure...

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Malachi, you see—it is not so much a proper name as it is a title. “My messenger.”

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Shut them real tight—real fast and real tight—those eyes of yours. And do you see it—do you see that flicker of starlight peace.

Do you see—who is it? John, Jesus—yes. And? You. And you? And me? And us! And we...

It is more of a question...Will you be a Malachi? “My messenger.” Will we be a Malachi—will we be the messenger for this age, this world, this neighbor, this houseguest, this pew mate, this stranger, this little one...

It is the flicker of what is to come. Not when we look out there in the distance trying to see what peace will be—but when we claim its truth as so real, so sure, so coming, so much so that in our flesh we live that peace with each other.

In that flicker of starlight peace—when we are the peace that God lives in this world then in flesh—in our flesh—we “see the salvation of God.”

As we allow that full of liveness incarnation that is God to be our swagger and our flicker too—we prepare the way. We prepare the way for the fullness of vision that is now a flicker of starlight peace. Flicker and flounce and twirl, oh flesh, take on full of liveness, see the salvation of God -- “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting... and Prince of Peace.” Amen.