

Pastor T.C. Arnold
2nd Sunday in Advent
Malachi 4:1-6
December 9th, 2012

Malachi the prophet in today's appointed Old Testament text says these words: "*For behold, the day is coming...*" Think about what it must have been like for the children of God four hundred years before the birth of the Savior to hear words like this. Put yourselves in their shoes and call to mind everything you and your relatives before you experienced. You have heard stories of slavery in Egypt and a long desert excursion that lasted an entire generation. You have heard of the hardships of war and conquest as the Lord returns your people to the Promised Land. You have heard about the prophets who warned the people of God about judgment, invaders from the north kingdom (Assyria) and a return again to the land God gave. And then, maybe even you, experienced being torn from your land, taken into captivity in a foreign place called Babylon and then finally allowed to return.

And after years of hardship, after centuries of stories told and heard of your people being mistreated and misbehaving, you are finally back in the safety and security of the land God had given you. You are back and things seem to be the way they are suppose to be. Then all of a sudden you hear words like this from Malachi, "*For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.*" There is still more to come? There is more "judgment," more harsh words, more condemnation? There is still more hardship and strife for the children of God?

Fast-forward to our day and life right now. The people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt, in Assyria and by the rulers in Babylon. There is enslavement we feel today. Perhaps our minds and hearts are enslaved to the regrets we have... all the "*woulda, shoulda, coulda*" statements we have made to ourselves. Perhaps our mind is enslaved with guilt because of past transgressions that continue to affect our lives and the lives of others right now. Perhaps, if we are honest with ourselves, we can understand why Malachi, after so much trouble the people have already been through, could stand before them with words of judgment (which, in fact, the whole book of Malachi is a warning against the abuses of worship and false teaching). We understand, even in the midst of our struggles, why we still need to hear the law. Because we are always striving to do what Malachi was warning the people about; unfaithfulness, serving other gods (you name what gets in your way when it comes to serving the Lord), putting other vices before the Lord.

To those who do not heed this warning, stubble will be made of them. They will be left with neither root nor branch. That's the judgment. However, Malachi added the Gospel, "But..." He says, "*But for those who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.*" We might think that Malachi meant to put s-o-n of righteousness instead of s-u-n of righteousness. That's no mistake. He is simply calling God what He has been called for centuries. For example, Psalm 84 says, "*For the Lord God is a sun (s-u-n) and shield.*" God is the light of life. The Son is the light of life (s-o-n). The Sun is the Son who comes with healing in His wings. Malachi is right, Jesus is the Sun. The Psalmist is right, Jesus is the Sun. The hymn-writers are right... "Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness." Jesus shines brightly on our darkest days. Jesus is the light that comes into the world, even a world as dark as this one. Jesus comes and gives light to the way of righteousness, to the plan of salvation, to path of heaven. Jesus is the light that shines and makes Himself known as the light of the world.

And four hundred years before the birth of our Savior, it was a dark time indeed. Maybe a little more history will help fill in the cracks... and to show how history really does tend to repeat itself. In 587 B.C. Judah was taken into captivity to Babylon in the East. The Persian Empire

began to rise. Not long after, Babylon fell into Persian hands and the children of Israel were allowed to return to the Holy Land. A Judean Governor by the name of Zerubbabel led the people to rebuild the Temple destroyed earlier in the Babylonian conquest. The date of its completion was about 516 B.C.—about 70 years after the original captivity. Ezra the priest came back about 458 B.C. and strengthened the Temple worship. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem as well and rebuilt the walls. He did much to help the poor and strengthen faith and marriage. But when Nehemiah returned to the service of the Persian king, things fell apart for the Jews.

Nehemiah came back and found that the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath was broken and marriage and faith that he had so diligently preached about was lost. What led to such atrocities was the fact that the priests themselves were corrupt. Those who were given the task to be faithful, and to speak the law, do make sacrifice according the prescribed ways God had given, were cutting corners and ignoring the Word of God. Those were dark days indeed because the Light of the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness, was being ignored.

Sin continues to corrupt the worship-life of God's people. Whether it be churches that change the gospel truth to reflect how society has changed, whether it be parishioners who care not about the blessed means of grace our Lord gives, or whether it is pastors who stifle God's Word so as not to offend anyone, our lives are affected by our own sinful desires. You see, the same bad things that happened in the days of Malachi the prophet are repackaged, re-done and re-lived today. In the text, Malachi speaks of a Lord who comes. Today is no different. Our Lord comes.

The Sun of Righteousness shines forth on the people of God. The sun shines and life is given – life comes to a people who are dead. Remember that Malachi says, *“For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”* Oh do we count on that healing in the wings of our Lord. He covers us with those wings...which means He covers us with every bit of Himself. He covers us in the bad times and in the good. He covers us when life's unexpected difficulties mount up and anxiety fills our heart. That's right, our Lord is covering us even when we feel exposed in this vast wilderness that attacks us from every angle. Yes, even when you are asking, “Where is God?” He is with you to the very end of the age because He promises that that is so. The Sun of Righteousness – Jesus our Heavenly King – shines down on us, covers us in the forgiveness of sins. The Son, s-o-n, is the Sun, s-u-n, in the hymns and passages we read and sing. He is the light that lightens the darkness of our world and our lives.

Malachi says, *“For behold the day is coming.”* Which day was that again? Christmas? That has already come. The Day is coming... which day? The day I will finally get that promotion, that person will finally get off my back, the day I will be cancer-free? When will those days be? Perhaps we will have to wait as long as the last day – the day our Lord is coming. Come Lord Jesus and deliver us from this vale of tears. Beloved, He promises to do so. When? Not sure. He came, He comes, He will come again. That's Advent. Malachi's words before Jesus' birth and after Jesus' birth ring true. His deliverance has come to us. His deliverance is yet to come. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.