

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent  
Malachi 4:1-16  
December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010

I will be preaching this morning a sermon that is all about me – which means, I think, this sermon is going to be great! How can it not be great? I mean, it's about me. And when I say it's about me I mean it's about the way I am – especially during these cold winter months that have now descended upon us. When it gets cold outside, if you know me, you know that my hands get cold. How many of you have come out of church and said, “your hands are so cold, pastor.” They are cold a lot. That's me. My feet get cold too. I went out and bought myself a new pair of warm house slippers to wear around the house and I gave them to Andrea to give to me at Christmas. I have multiple pairs of extra warm socks. I have hand warmers up here in the pulpit just to keep my hands at least kind of warm. I get cold. I hate the winter time. It's all about me today trying to endure the cold winter. You see, I told you it's going to be a great sermon. How do you like it so far?

A sermon about me is not going to make a great sermon. But you may think a sermon about you makes a great sermon. You have even told me that when the law preached to you is a word that cuts right to your heart... The Gospel preached to you – the Word of God that speaks to you – what comforts you – what is meaningful to you – are the sermons that you like best. So, I might think sermons about me are the best sermons. You might think that sermons about you are the best sermons – maybe a sermon about how cold you are – how much you like or dislike winter, the short days, the darkness – is the best sermon. Now that we are talking about you, do you like the sermon even better than before?

I think you realize that a sermon about me is not going to be the best sermon. I hope you realize that a sermon about you is not going to be the best sermon either. The Word of God preached from this place may include me but is not to be about me. The sermon preached from this place may include you but is not to be about you. But it may be about what we are – especially now that it's December and winter fast approaches – cold. There's a good chance you are cold – like me – even like the people who were being addressed by the prophet Malachi in the Old Testament text for this 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent.

The people who were being addressed by Malachi – some 400 years before the birth of our Savior Jesus – were cold. Perhaps this is why Malachi has these choice words for them: “*For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all 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.*” The people were cold – so Malachi warms them up. He warms them with a fire that burns in an oven (hot fires). This will be like the Lord's judgment day to judge the living and the dead. The Lord uses images of heat and fire and burning to portray the Day of Judgment. Heat convicts those who are cold. Judgment rains down on those evildoers who seem to prosper in this life but will end up like a plant's stalk after harvest. The fire will be so intense – for the cold hearted – that nothing of the plant will remain.

You see, this is a sermon about me – I'm cold – cold hands, cold feet and a cold heart. This is also a sermon about you – cold hands, cold feet, and a cold heart. Are we Christians with cold hearts? At times we are.

When Malachi addressed these words to Judah they were experiencing winter in the world around them. As they sought to be faithful to their Lord, they struggled with the age-old problem of prosperity of the wicked. “*It's futile to serve God,*” they said. “*The evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape*” (Mal. 3:14-15). Their mournful cry was “*Where is the God of justice?*” (Mal. 2:17).

As God's people, who desire to obey God and walk in His ways, we also experience a wintry frustration and discouragement at the seeming triumph of evil over good. Our neighbors who talk easily about cheating on their taxes (or on their husbands or wives) seem to escape the consequences of their deeds. The friend who conducts his or her business by deceit or shady practices wins the fat contract – and a promotion from the boss. Just watching the news at night can tempt us to think that fear and hate gets things done while love and trust sit back in the corner. Since the gods of merit, success, and results seem to rule, we too might be heard to ask, "What's the use of serving God?" We get complacent. We give up. We think, "What's the use." We start to rely on those things that the wicked have called their gods since the beginning. We find ourselves worshipping at the altar of success and results as much as those we criticize. We get sucked in to acting like children of the world instead of children of the Heavenly Father.

For the evildoer, fire rains down on the Day of Judgment – according to Malachi. Perhaps from images such as this we get a picture of hell as being a place that closely resembles an oven. But I'm not sure if you realize, according to Malachi, fire rains down on the righteous as well. Not to make us like stubble – that's reserved for the unbeliever on the last day. Rather, Jesus comes as the SUN in contrast to the burning fire of judgment. What does the sun do? It warms the believer with the healing message of God's righteous in Christ – even to the faithful who continue to not see the success or not see the results. You know we call Jesus the SON. Did you know we also call him the SUN?

There are two popular hymns that liken Jesus to the sun. One we will be singing at Christmas, Hark the Harold Angels Sing. "*Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the sun of righteousness!*" Also a hymn we just sung again this morning, Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies. It says, "*Sun of righteousness, arise, Triumph o'er the shades of night...*" The warmth of Christ's righteousness remains upon the faithful. The bright beams of light are the "*healing in its wings*" talked about in verse two of the Old Testament text. When evil seems to win the day, the SUN of righteousness penetrates the darkness and reaches the faithful. This is Jesus as the SUN who, on the last day, promises you and me righteousness that can only come by what He did on that cross at Calvary.

The Sun of Righteousness – S-U-N and the Son of Righteousness – S-O-N are one in the same. Both give light and life in a dark world. Nothing is more needful than light as the days get colder and darker (this winter season). And it's this light – this S-U-N Jesus – this S-O-N Jesus – is what this sermon is all about. It's not a sermon about me and how cold my hands and feet get. But it is about how cold my heart, bogged down by sin, can be. It's not about you and how cold you might get. But it about how cold your heart might be – bogged down by what seems to be God's righteousness to evil-doers through earthly success. This is about Jesus and what He has made to be for you. His success translates into your success. The results of what He did for you are not found on the bottom line of your sales document, they are not found on how well behaved your children are, and they are not found on how much money you make or how big your house happens to be. The success is found in blood – shed for you. This is about the SUN and the SON.

May the Lord of Advent bless you and keep you in these dark days turn to light in Christ. Our hope is built on Christ's righteousness. That hope came two thousand years ago in Bethlehem. We are getting closer – to the bright star – to the brilliance of the angels – to the light of the world come for you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds. Amen.