

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan
The Second Sunday in Advent
December 6, 2015
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.

Have you ever seen an important person visit somewhere? I was able to a couple of these important visits while I was living in Ottawa, Ontario. Ottawa is Canada's national capital and I had the privilege of witnessing Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles visit Canada during my time in Ottawa. I was able to show up at a couple of places and see two important people. However, I wouldn't have been able to do this without proper preparation by the Canadian government.

Security was fairly tight when I saw these two people. There were snipers on top of buildings. Police cars seemed to be everywhere. There were barricades to prevent you from getting too close. A lot of work went into preparing the way for Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles. My experiences of seeing Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles remind me a lot of our lesson today. Our lesson talks about the coming of Jesus who is our king, but a lot of preparation needs to go on before we are able to meet him.

Who will get us ready? Who will get us prepared? The Canadian government made sure I was able to see Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles. Who gets us ready to see our king? Our lesson today tells us who will get us ready to meet our king. It tells us the Lord's messenger will clear the way for his coming. This preparation is our main focus today: The Lord's messenger clears the way. He prepares us for the Lord's coming. He proclaims repentance. He draws us to joyful and thankful service.

The first thing we will look at is how the Lord's messenger clears the way for us by preparing us for the Lord's coming. Malachi tells us about this messenger, **“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.**” The Lord tells us he will send his messenger who will prepare us another messenger's coming.

Who are these two messengers and the message they bring? Our gospel lesson identifies the Lord's messenger who clears and prepares the way before the Lord. **“The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.’”**

“The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation.” Luke tells us Malachi is referring to John the Baptist. He does it by quoting the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah and Malachi both tell us one of the goals of the Lord's messenger was to prepare us for the Lord's coming. John prepared God's people for Jesus' first coming. Malachi points this out to us, **“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.” The Lord promised to send one messenger before the second one came. This messenger would be like the Canadian government in my introduction. Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles didn't just show up in Ottawa. The Canadian government put a lot of effort in getting ready for them to come.

John the Baptist acted like the Canadian government in my introduction. He got everything ready for the King's coming. He prepared and cleared the way for Jesus to come. How did John clear the way for

Jesus' coming? He cleared the way by proclaiming a message of repentance. Malachi describes his message this way, **"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." Malachi says John's message will be filled with reminders about the need for a savior. John will show this need for a savior by pointing people to judgment day and asking them, "Will they be able to stand before the Lord without fear? Will they be able to endure the day of his coming?" The answer John expects is no. No one is able to endure or stand when the Lord comes.

Why will no one be able to endure or stand before the Lord when he comes? It is because of what the Lord asks of us. The Lord makes clear to us in the Bible only perfect people will be able to endure when the Lord comes. Malachi has an interesting way of pointing this truth out. He uses the picture of refining silver and gold to make his point. Silver and gold are valuable metals. They are rare, they can be used in a lot of different ways to make things and were often used as money.

There is one issue when it comes to silver and gold. When they have imperfections in them (other metals or minerals) they aren't as valuable because they aren't as strong or useful as pure silver and gold. How do you get rid of these imperfections? You use fire to refine silver and gold. The fire drives out the imperfections and leaves only silver and gold behind. Or it melts the silver and gold where it can be caught in its pure form. Either way refining makes them much more valuable.

Malachi makes it clear that only pure silver and gold will be able to stand and endure the great day of the Lord. How pure are our lives? Are they pure 100% silver and gold? Or are they say 85% pure? Usually, we like to think of ourselves in the 75-95% range. We might not be totally pure silver or gold, but there is a lot more good in us than bad. Most people think this range of purity is good enough to stand and endure the last day, but is this what God thinks?

His messenger gives us the resounding answer, "No." **"But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?"** The Lord's messenger points out to us God isn't satisfied with 95 or 85 or 45% pure silver and gold. He demands we be 100% pure and there will be no possible way for us to withstand the day our king returns to earth, holds us up to the fire and the moment he sees impurity dripping from us he will discard us because we are not 100% pure.

How can we avoid be cast off because we are not 100% pure metal? Fortunately for us, the Lord's messenger reveals this truth to us before our king comes. **"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."** Malachi says the savior will be like a refiner's fire. The fire he provides drives and melts away the imperfections which plague us.

Jesus is the one who purifies us and cleans us from the stain of sin. The fire of his love drives out our impurities. The heat of his burning love melts away our offenses against him. His love has refined us and enables us to be able to stand before him on the last day and endure the great day of his coming. The

Lord's messenger has prepared us to be refined by the love of our savior and enabled us to believe the sweet message of us forgiveness.

The sweetness of Jesus' forgiveness brings us to the last way the Lord's messenger clears the way for the Lord. The Lord's messenger clears the way for us to joyfully and thankfully serve him. Malachi describes this service by saying, **"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."**

Malachi says the people who have had their hearts cleared and prepared by the Lord's messenger will bring offerings to the Lord. These offerings will come from these hearts because they appreciate and understand what the Lord has done for them. They will realize Jesus has prepared them for eternity and will allow them to endure the great day of the Lord. They will eagerly wait and look forward to the day he returns because they are prepared and trust in his mercy.

What are the offerings Malachi is talking about? The word offerings might bring to mind putting money into the collection plate. This is a great way to think about offerings, but can an offering be more than simply putting money into the plate? Yes, offerings can be much more than putting money into the offering plate. Offerings to the Lord include showing genuine kindness to one another. Kindness which shows we are ready for our king's return.

Our offerings to the Lord include forgiving with one another. Sometimes someone does something stupid to us and it hurts us. This hurt makes us angry. Couldn't we let go of the hurt and forgive the person because we understand Jesus has forgiven them? Our offerings could include using our talent to help others. You could patch a hole in the wall for your neighbor who doesn't know how to do it. We can encourage and pray for our neighbors who are going through hard times.

These are just a few of the many and different offerings we can give to the Lord and they all have one thing in common. Our joyful and thankful service shows our hearts have been refined by the fire of Jesus' love for us. They show our hearts are purified for service to our king. A lot of preparation goes into getting ready for the arrival of an important person. I pray the Lord's messenger continues to clear the way in our hearts for our coming king. Amen.