

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Malachi 4:1-6

Luke 21:5-21

There are only two weeks of classes until Dead Week. You can't count next week because of the distraction of Thanksgiving break. It is a little more than a month and one week until Christmas. Only that much time to do all the shopping and preparations. Of course there is still Thanksgiving next week, but that may give us a little extra time for Christmas shopping. Even then, will we be ready by December 25?

We have even less time until the end of the Church year. In two weeks we will begin Advent, the start of that new year. So this as always is a time when we hear in church about the end of all time. We are told, "There is only so much time, so we better be ready." The Old Testament like the passage today from Malachi uses the term, "The Day of the LORD." "The Day of the LORD" refers to God putting things right. Many people talk about "The Day of the LORD" as when Jesus secretly comes to set things right. Since there is only so much time until that happens, they say then we should do everything now so we reach a point at which we can say, "We're ready!" It would be like securing buildings before a hurricane or bulldozing a clear path in front of a forest fire. Or it is like making sure that we have enough homework or business work done before a deadline. Then we can say we're ready. But how do we know when we will be ready for the end of time?

There is all kinds of information on line, on TV programs, and in books about the end times. 9/11 and the rise of Islamic terrorism, the decline of morals in our society, global warming, and the globalization of the economy are all seen as signs that the end is near. These sources of information focus on how we should be able to identify what is happening in the world. The idea is that we should do so much work in our lives and in our society to be ready. For example, we are told that being ready involves changing things politically so that old moral standards are enforced. Or we are told that if we build up the nation of Israel we will prepare for Jesus to come. Or if we achieve a certain moral standard then we will be ready for Jesus. All of these ideas give us control in some way over bringing about "The Day of the LORD."

But listen to what Jesus says, "Nations will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famine, and pestilence in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven." It sounds a lot like today. It also describes 100 years ago. It may describe 100 or even 1,000 years from now. The point is that since Jesus ascended into heaven, He could come back at any time. Jesus goes on, "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you know you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the Kingdom is near." We can see the leaves drop from the trees. We feel the cold and the crisp frost. We know that winter is near. But we just observe it. We don't make it happen. In the same way we can't control or predict exactly when the end will come. We just know that it will happen because God says so.

So how are we to be ready for that? If we feel getting ready means getting to a certain point, getting to a certain level, we'll never make it. In our Old Testament lesson Malachi writes to the people:

Surely the day is coming; it will be like a furnace. All the arrogant and very evil doer will be stubble, and that day is coming when I will set them on fire, "says the LORD almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.

Malachi wrote to people very late in the Old Testament period. He wrote long after people had returned from exile in Babylon. They thought their problems should have been over with since the exile was over with. The thought "The Day of the LORD" should already have happened. But instead they were under the Persian Empire. Some of them still worshiped idols. It seemed as though "The Day of the LORD" had missed them.

So should we be ready for a "Day of the LORD"? In the year 1,000 people looked for

“Doomsday” and nothing happened. There was talk around the year 2,000 that the world might end, but it is still going on. I didn’t panic when the Red Sox finally won a World Series in the century and got over the “Curse of the Bambino.” That is what happened when in 1920 they sold Babe Ruth to the Yankees and the Red Sox went on for almost 90 years without a championship. But the Cubs won a few years back—and the world still exists!

Again we are thinking of “The Day of the LORD” as something we influence or can control. But it is the “Day of the LORD!”

The elections are now less than a year away, but many of us are tired of hearing about it. I remember the first time I could vote in 1976. I was old enough because they just changed the law to switch the minimal voting age from 21 to 18. It was an exciting thing to do. But as I have voted and voted in more elections, it seems to take more effort to do it. Why? The choices so often seem to be the same choices which doesn’t feel like any choice any more.

Perhaps my problem is that I am conditioned here in North America to think that if there is to be any solution, any real change, it will have to come from one of us, or it won’t come at all.

Have you seen the size of the “self-help” section in a Barnes and Noble or other book store? Addicted? Overweight? Unhappy? Stupid with computers? Well buy this book and you can fix that. Help yourself! As Dr. Phil is fond of saying, “Only you can manage what is wrong with you.”

But that’s a lie. We are creatures of habit. We are caught in our ruts. Most of us are doing whatever we do, not because it brings us great joy, but because it is simply what we can do. It is us and the biggest rut is the sin that convinces us that we can be in control. That’s why the prophet speaks of “The Day of the LORD.” God will come to show who is in control. Then He can free us from our struggle to try to be in control. He did that with the people of Israel first by allowing them to be conquered by their enemies. Then He allowed them to return home. But more than that He became one of us in Jesus to let Jesus experience all the punishment we deserve for trying to be in charge. Jesus frees us so that He can rule in our lives.

Jesus also tells us “The Day of the LORD” will come when He comes at the end of time. There is nothing we can do about this—no way we can control or manipulate this. Instead that day will be all about people realizing that we are helpless. But for those who look in faith to Jesus, we rejoice because our loss of control means that God is fully in control. As Jesus said, “Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

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