

Order of Worship for August 13, 2023

Prelude:

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

Opening Hymn: “*Hark the Glad Sound*” – Hymn #349

Sacrament of Holy Baptism: Alastair Michael Ciccotti

Confession and Forgiveness

P: God's messenger proclaims that the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come. The day of the LORD is coming soon. The way of his coming is prepared.

C: But who can abide the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

P: Lest that Day surprise us unawares, let us confess our sins to God our Father, imploring his forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ, who waits to grant salvation to all.

C: Most merciful God, we confess that we are unprepared for the coming of our Lord. With our minds, our lips, and our whole lives we have disobeyed your will. We have not borne the fruits worthy of repentance. We beg your forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ, and seek the power of your Holy Spirit to restore our joy.

P: The one who is coming has come, born among us to live our life and die our death, and guarantee our resurrection. In His name and by His Authority, your sins are forgiven. The joy of your salvation is restored.

C: **Amen.**

Service of the Word

Entrance Psalm:

P: Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before Me.

C: And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.

P: Blessèd be the Lord God of Israel,

C: for He has visited and redeemed His people.

P: And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

C: for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways,

P: to give knowledge of salvation to His people

C: in the forgiveness of their sins,

P: because of the tender mercy of our God,

C: whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high

P: to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

C: to guide our feet into the way of peace.

P: Behold, I send My messenger and He will prepare the way before Me.

C: And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

ALL: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Behold, I send My messenger and He will prepare the way before Me.

C: And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple.

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

P: Let us pray.... Almighty, eternal God, in the Word of Your apostles and prophets You have proclaimed to us Your saving will. Grant us faith to believe Your promises that we may receive eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Malachi 1:

R: The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

“I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the Lord of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.’” Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the LORDX beyond the border of Israel!”

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ By offering polluted food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted You?’ By saying that the LORD's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. And now entreat the favor of God, that He may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will He show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the LORD's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the LORD what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and My name will be feared among the nations.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Message: *“Malachi the Prophet”*

We’ve now come to the last of the minor prophets; Malachi. We don’t really know much about him. We know his name means messenger. But we know he’s the last. He’s the last book in our Old Testament: the Hebrew Old Testament ends with Chronicles. He’s the last chronologically. Yet as we see, it seems like the people still haven’t learned anything from the prophets that came before.

The first three chapters of this book are a dialogue, a kind of Q and A, in which God accuses the Jewish people of religious hypocrisy and just going through the motions. They complained that worship was boring, exclaiming, “What a weariness!” (1:13). Throughout the dialogue of Malachi, God will offer a critique and follow up with a question, demanding an answer why.

But rather than answering, the people respond defensively with their own questions:

“How have you loved us?” (Malachi 1:2, ESV).

“How have we despised your name?” (1:6).

“Have we polluted you?” (1:7).

The Jews in Malachi sound like children caught in the act of doing something wrong who then question the rationale of the rule they’re caught breaking. And in so doing, they question God’s goodness and justice.

Have you ever questioned God in a similarly, defensive way? I know that I have. “You say that you love me, God? Then prove it!” “If you’re so good, then why did you let this bad thing happen? If you’re so just, Lord, then why do you let the wicked people run roughshod over the righteous?” “Why do you put me through so much stress and trouble when all I’ve ever tried to do is serve you?” “Won’t you ever just let me be happy?” Do any of these questions sound familiar to you?

Keep in mind: Malachi did not prophesy to pagans. He prophesied to God’s people (including the priests) after the return of the Exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. The times were good, and the people should’ve been grateful for all God had done for them. But instead of gratitude, they wearied God with their grievances.

Their sacrifices are not the unblemished, perfect sacrifices that God demanded. Instead, the sacrifices were blind or lame, the animals that weren’t good enough for the people, so they could be given to God instead. They were giving God the worst leftovers, instead of giving God the first fruits.

And so we get a great reversal. We usually end the service with the Aaronic blessing., found in the book of Numbers: “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

“So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Malachi reverses it. Malachi tells the people that they should entreat God’s favor, but they have profaned the altar. The priests are supposed to put God’s name on the people, but the priests

instead despise God's name. Instead of God lifting his face upon them, he looks down upon their dirty faces with disgust. Instead of God being gracious to them, God's judgment is coming.

Despite all of the condemnation, though, we need to remember God's starting point. The first words God speaks are, "I have loved you." All that follows comes out of love. That's what we need to remember.

Hymn: *"When Morning Gilds the Skies"* - **Hymn #807**

Malachi 2:

R: "And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to My name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that My covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared Me. He stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep My ways but show partiality in your instruction." Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, "Why does He not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did He not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied Him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God

Message: Chapter 2 continues what began in chapter one. The priests continue to be called out for their bad behavior. They seem determined to prove to us that truth of a quote from CS Lewis, that “of all bad men, religious bad men are the worst.”

Those who should know better, those who should have upheld a higher standard, were causing the problems. They were supposed to bring blessings on the people, but were instead bringing on curses. They were supposed to remove the unclean things from the temple, but instead God was going to smear unclean dung all over them.

Worst of all, the priests seem oblivious to what they’re doing wrong. The dialogue continues here: “Why doesn’t God accept our offerings?” (2:14, paraphrased).

“How have we wearied [the Lord]?” (2:17).

“Where is the God of justice?” (2:17).

As we’ll see, the God of justice is watching them and judging them. And they will not like it when he comes in judgment.

We’ll also see this theme continue on in the New Testament. Jesus is often harshest with the Pharisees and the priests, those who should know God’s Word, and yet are adding rules and leading people astray. “Of all bad men, religious bad men are the worst.”

We also hear a complaint about how the Jewish men are divorcing their wives and marrying foreign women. This isn’t a national or racial problem – it’s a religious problem. These wives aren’t like Ruth from Moab, who declares that the Israelites will be her people and their God will be her God. These women Malachi speaks against are leading the men astray, to worship the gods of the surrounding nations. Adultery, both literal and figurative, are in play, and denying the vows of faithfulness to their wives and to God are something that God cannot leave unjudged or unpunished.

Hymn: “*Preach You the Word*” - **Hymn #586**

Malachi 3

R: “Behold, I send My messenger and he will prepare the way before Me. And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But 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. he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the

offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

“Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And thereby put Me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

“Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against You?’ You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’”

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed His name. “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up My treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

P: O God, You are like a refiner’s fire, and Your Spirit enkindles the hearts of Your faithful people with the fire of Your love. Bless us that we may be found rightly prepared to share in the Feast of Light which has no end; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Message:

Who can endure the day of God’s coming? We’ve heard that throughout the minor prophets. People cry out to God to save them, but they think that they must be on God’s side, without thinking about the reasons that God might be angry with them. God is going to purify his people, especially the priests, the sons of Levi.

That's also why Jesus had to come. He wasn't a son of Levi, yet he was the great high priest. All of the other priests had to offer sacrifices not only for the sins of the people, but for their own sins, as well. Jesus didn't have to do that. Jesus was pure.

They also wondered if faith was useless, asserting, "It is vain to serve God" (3:14). Yet God says he will show them it is not vain. God wants to be generous with them, but there's no room in their hands for anything else. They've been giving God the bad leftovers and keeping the best for themselves, but that's not working out so well. So God challenges them to put His generosity to the test: "Bring the full tithe ... and thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need" (Mal. 3:10). If the people turn back to God, they will be blessed to overflowing. He will give them so many blessings they won't know what to do with them.

God's blessings aren't always measured in dollars and cents. Many blessings are monetary, but most are not: health, a good marriage, respectful children, a good reputation, good weather, faithful friends, devout rulers and government. These are just a few of the many blessings God wanted to give his people, and they were rejecting. God had given them so much that all he wants in return is a prayer of thanksgiving and a tiny tithe: ten percent. "How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me?" the Psalmist asks (Ps. 116:12, NIV). The answer: You can't! You can't out-give God because he loves to bless you.

Perhaps we can see that best in this story. A woman visited a silversmith who held a piece of silver in the fire, explaining that the silver had to be held in the very middle of the fire to burn away any impurities. The woman thought of Malachi 3:3: God "will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." She asked if the silversmith had to be there the whole time and he said, yes. He had to hold and keep his eye on the silver lest it be in the fire too long and be destroyed. "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" she asked. "Oh, that's easy," he answered, "when I see my image in it." God promised to refine and purify his people. But as he did so, he kept his eye on them so they wouldn't be destroyed. And he watched to see his image in them.

Hymn: *"How Firm a Foundation"* - **Hymn #728**

Malachi 4:

R: "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. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and just decrees that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

P: Let us praise the Lord, for He truly keeps His Word. The sun of righteousness has dawned upon us who have sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Message: So in the final verse of Malachi, the last verse of the Old Testament, God threatened sudden and “utter destruction” (Malachi 4:6). That is, the last thing God said was a kind of curse. This curse was so devastating, that in the Jewish synagogues, when they read from Malachi, the lector would re-read verse 5 after verse 6, just to make sure that the reading didn’t end on such a negative note.

Here is the prophecy of verse 5: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (Malachi 4:5).

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets (both chronologically and canonically). His was the last voice heard by the people of Israel before 400 years of prophetic silence. Since the people would not answer God’s questions, he did not answer theirs. God and Israel both gave each other the “silent treatment.” For after Malachi, there was no new Word from the Lord until the arrival of John the Baptist. 400 years of silence. 400 years without God’s Word. 400 years is a long time. To put it into perspective, consider that we’re a little over 400 years since the Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock to found their colony in Massachusetts. It’s been over 400 years since the first Thanksgiving Feast. Think about how during that time the United States grew from a fledgling colony barely getting by to an international superpower sending human beings into outer space and to the moon! 400 years is also about the amount of time between Columbus’s “discovery” of America in 1492 and the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. 400 years is how much time elapsed between the death of Martin Luther (1546) and the end of World War II (1945). During that time, communication went from a hand-cranked Gutenberg printing press to wireless radio communication and transatlantic phone cables. Messages that used to take weeks or months to get one from place to another could now reach instantaneously. 400 years is also the amount of time that the Israelites spent in slavery in Egypt. 400 years is a long time.

Yet despite all of that time, God didn’t forget his people. He was preparing to fulfill what all the prophets pointed to, Jesus, the coming Messiah, the one in whom the hopes and fears of all the years would be joined.

Hymn: *“Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies”*- **Hymn #873**

Matthew 11:7-15

P: As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send My messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way before you.’

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

P: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Children’s Message:

Hymn: “*Herald, Sound the Note of Judgment*”- **Hymn #511**

Message: Approximately 400 years after Malachi, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness proclaiming a Baptism of repentance and urging people to “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:1). Suddenly, after not sending a prophet to Israel for four centuries, a prophet appeared in camel skin clothes and eating wild honey. His appearance reminded people of the prophet Elijah, and his message was nearly the same: repent, turn away from sin and return to God. John was the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy that God would send back the prophet Elijah before the Day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). As we just heard, Jesus himself declared that John “is Elijah who is to come” (Matthew 11:14).

But John, like so many other prophets, was persecuted, arrested, killed for speaking the words God gave him to speak. He spoke out against abuses among the religious leaders, and spoke out against the king’s divorce and remarriage. For that, he lost his head.

Malachi pointed to John the Baptist, the messenger who was to come. But Malachi and John both pointed to Jesus, the coming Messiah. Jesus, the Son of Righteousness, who came to bring light into the world and shine on us to heal us. Jesus, who came to bring the promised kingdom. Jesus, who came to be our great high priest. Jesus, who came to heal, restore, and enliven hope, to shine on us with a love that will never set. Now that’s a promise to end on.

Prayer of the Church:

P: Lord in Your mercy,

C: hear our prayer.

Closing Prayer:

P: God almighty, we thank You for sending Your messenger, John the Baptist, and for appearing at the temple Yourself in Jesus Christ as You promised through Malachi. Help us to hold to Your promises until that day when Jesus returns. In His name we pray.

C Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“Hail to the Lord’s Anointed”* - **Hymn #398**

Postlude: