

WELCOME 28th July 2019 – 7 Pentecost '19 C

Malachi 1 & 2

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! Special welcome to our visitors/guests! It's our privilege & joy to serve you in worship.

"Half-hearted, Insipid, Going through the motions. Lazy.'

It sounds like Wimbledon's verdict on Bernard Tomic's 1st round loss. Or John McEnroe discussing Nick Kyrgios' training regimen. Or a boss *trying to get the best* from an employee.

It's not...it's God reflecting on his people's attitude to worship. They had slipped into spiritual neutral - maintaining the externals, dutifully performing the rituals, coasting along in their faith but not really investing in it. Their hearts weren't in it. They had become spiritually lazy/apathetic. As we relate to the Father...that apathy/laziness is dangerous...deadly even. God had withheld nothing from them from the day he called Abraham from the Aramean wastelands to go to a promised land as God's chosen. His love had been evident at every step of their lives...but they were responding with snores shrugs & half-hearted lives...

So God sends Malachi to reveal the emptiness of their religion, to remind them of his love, & to reawaken in them a passion for the relationship God had initiated with them in worship that brings honour and glory to God's name & in lives that give witness to his power at work in His people.

Today Malachi asks us to do some honest reflecting as he helps us answer this important question, Why should I care?

We'll explore & experience that today...

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, there is no time like the present & we have no moment but this one. So open our hearts to you. Move in by your Spirit & grow the fruit of your Word in us. Capture each moment each thought & make it captive to Christ for whom we live & to whom you are conforming our lives...In His Name we pray...Amen!

7 PENTECOST '19 C – MAJOR QUESTIONS FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: WHY SHOULD I CARE?

FAITH CHAT:

1. "Apathy" literally means, "without passion." Is there a part of your life that is without passion? Why? Why not?
2. What do you think it means to "give God your very best"? How does one do that?

You may have seen the old poem by Wilbur Rees... **\$3 worth of God**... It has been re-written & re-used often...

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God
to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy not repentance,
transcendence not transformation.
I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

— Wilbur Rees

That is exactly the worldview into which Malachi speaks. About 100 years before Malachi was called by God, Haggai came to Israel from Persia to kickstart the Temple rebuilding project that had stalled. A sense of complacency & self-interest had set in & the people were spending more time building their homes, expanding their financial interests, taking care of the things they thought were urgent, but they neglected the important critical crucial nature of their place in the world as God's chosen people. So Haggai came with his challenge from God & lo/behold they got to work. They finished the Temple. Worship/sacrifices at the appointed times took place. They studied the Law...reflect their place as God's own
But it wasn't long ^{b/4} old bad habits crept back in...They sat in worship thinking... This isn't like the Temple I remember...why bother? Priests used to be better...I never have liked that song...hmm going long again...who's texting?...better check! Man I was up late last night. Maybe I'll close my eyes pretend I'm praying or maybe I can say "I got slain in the spirit"...Offering! Nuts! I'm short this week...a few coins'll do... Kids aren't going to get anything today but morning tea...& dirty on the playground. We've got sport 5 of the next 6 weeks... ahhh she'll be right...

Others were cozy & comfortable...bored...oh...they were there, but not as often & not as invested...wanted nothing different/challenging/out of routine. This is enough As long as I get mine...my chair my cushion my funeral...nothing more needed.

They were frustrated that the dramatic promises of God had not yet been realized. As a nation, they remained a small province in a forgotten backwater of the Persian Empire. God had not yet returned to his temple with majesty & power as they had known before & hoped to see again. God had not yet exalted his kingdom in the sight of the nations. Languishing in the disappointment of unfulfilled hopes lulled them into a low regard for God. Doubting God's covenant love & no longer trusting his justice, the Jews of the restored community began to lose hope. So their worship degenerated into a listless repetition of mere forms. They went through the motions. They no longer took Scripture seriously. They saw no consequences for their faithfulness so they expected no consequence for becoming lackadaisical. They said all the right things, held all the right beliefs, used all the right responses at all the right times... but it was all from here not from there. They'd shifted into spiritual neutral - coasting not really caring where they were headed...Why should I care?

How do I know the Bible is true? Because it always tells the truth about me about us about the great threat we, God's people, face from within: from the laxity & laziness & apathy that is so very real...the very real crippling threat you & I face from the assumption that since God is "always there" (like my fave slippers) I can ignore him leave him under the bed while I go through my day, he'll understand...like the friend who doesn't seem to mind when you forget your coffee appt/don't return a phone call or text... God gets it I'm busy got to give my job/kids my all so they're happy & this is good too Bible is true because it never fails to point to the place where I decide *Love the LORD your God with **all** your heart, **all** your soul, **all** your mind & **all** your strength* is optional & really means I can give God the leftovers...when I can squeeze it in...when I have time...when there's nothing else I'd rather be doing...when life finally settles down.

Into that worldview...into that very real threat...into that very real mind/heartset that the church God's people have faced from forever...Malachi steps in & simply asks, "Is that how you treat someone who loves you? Do you treat the people who love you that way? Do you treat your boss, spouse, your kids to the scraps of your time, the crumbs of your

affection, the leftovers of your effort/energy? The book of Malachi is written around 7 dialogues ^b/_i God & his people...7 back & forth questions/conversations & God open the 1st dialogue ^w/_/ the simple declaration: *"I have always loved you..."* – Mal 1:2 God begins this conversation not because he's about to bring down fire/brimstone but because he's heartbroken...he misses having his people's hearts beating in time with his...God is crushed that the people he loves would choose emptiness & apathy over fullness & life with him.

You see...God's love is not just some generic atmospheric condition like fog...sort of blankets everything as the circumstances persist...God's love is purposeful. God's love for his people has a goal: *"But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. On the day I act, you will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet..."* – Mal 4:2-3 God intends those who live in his love will experience true freedom – genuine release from burdens & bondage – joy & life in its fullness & abundance *The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, & destroy. I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness.* God says, I have always loved you so that in every part of your life you will experience freedom, joy, abundance, comfort, peace, satisfaction, victory...

Really? How have you loved us? Can you imagine saying that to God? Evidently they did...you know you've thought it...midst of grief, hurt went on & on, child or marriage really struggled, just wouldn't rain, debt was eye-deep & your income about covered your ankles, one frustration after another, no job Ok God...If this is what your love for me looks like, can you hate me for a week & let's see if I can tell the difference? I chose you...for my very own...out of the whole world...

YOU

Jacob...not Esau...look at your calendar & pick a day...I loved you then. Go back in time & pick a day...I loved you then. Do it again. I loved you then. You'll never find a day when I didn't love you. Never a moment when I didn't have my heart set on you. Never a second when you were anything less than the apple of my eye. You can't find an instant when my heart longed for anything less than you living in me & me in you *Even before he made the world, God loved us & chose us in Christ to be holy & without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, & it gave him great pleasure.* – Eph 1:4-5 OT/NT same good news...God chooses to lavish his love on his human creation...is not content to let sin/death/hell have one of us. And when we hold back ...choose to indulge other passions & be apathetic about that love... when we decide God deserves less than our wholehearted pursuit...complete devotion...God will not be silent...God will not ignore our indifference...He desires us fully totally wholeheartedly...He wants all of us...all of our lives...**ALL** heart/soul/mind/strength

And God reminds his people that the only way to take him/his love for granted is to forget just who he is...what he has done for them/us. There are 55 verses in Malachi's prophetic career...In 23 of them he uses God's Name (Yahweh) to call those who hear to attention...this is the Lord Almighty the Lord of Hosts the Lord of Heaven's Armies the Lord Creator of all that is the Lord who spoke & all things came into being...the Lord who alone is worthy of all honour glory & praise... the Lord who holds our lives in his hand...never lets go forsakes abandons

To hold back to seek other passions to give God the scraps to live as if his claim upon us his blessings for us his grace towards us is " meh...take it or leave it...why should I care?" is to hear the charge *"A son honours his father, & a servant respects his master. If I am your father & master, where are the honour & respect I deserve?"* As they shifted into spiritual neutral they began to believe that even God was indifferent to their lives before him...So when it came time for the offerings they found the least saleable lamb or calf in their paddock...one-eyed arthritic runt of the litter...this'll do. To that sort of shrug & snore God responds: *"How I wish one of you would shut the Temple doors so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies, "I will not accept your offerings. But my name is honoured by people of other nations from morning till night. All around the world they offer sweet incense & pure offerings in honour of my name. For my name is great among the nations," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.* Lackluster lackadaisical going through the motions of faithfulness without the power & passion of faith...God simply says No.

How we worship reflects what we think of God. The living out of our faith in less than fully God-honouring wholeheartedly devoted ways has God saying let's just shut you down. His name will be honoured. His name will be praised. But if isn't among his chosen people then he's happy to shut us down so that other people will praise his greatness & live lives that declare his glory. How did Luther frame it? God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray that it may be holy among us. God's kingdom certainly comes of itself w/o our prayer, but we pray that it may come also to us.. The good and gracious will of God is certainly done w/o our prayer, but we pray that it may also be done among us. His name will be honoured. His name will be praised. His glory will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea...and the Father desires that to be done through you...me...his church...his people before the face of the unbelieving world so that all people will be drawn in in awe & wonder & joy...

The Father holds nothing back from those he has chosen as his own...*Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?* He desires to give even more...*Look, God's home is now among his*

people! He will live with them, & they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, & there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever...To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, & I will be their God, & they will be my children. – Rev 21:3-7

Why should I care? Why bother? This'll do? She'll be right? God understands why I'm not here...why I offer the least...spend my life elsewhere...The simple truth from forever to Malachi to right this minute: when we offer the least of ourselves – give to the Father the leavings & leftovers of our time our treasure & our lives...when we sit content with less than highest praise & honour & blessing we will be disappointed. We will experience frustration & futility.

Today's Growing Praise...John Ortberg... I need to worship because without it I can forget that I have a big God beside me & live in fear. I need to worship because without it I can forget his calling & begin to live in a spirit of self-preoccupation. I need to worship because without it I lose a sense of wonder & gratitude & plod through life with blinders on. I need worship because my natural tendency is toward self-reliance & stubborn independence.”

We who are created to bear God's image to live his presence & live out his purpose in this world can only find fullness in wholehearted relationship wholehearted responsiveness wholehearted worship of the Father through Jesus Christ.

“But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. On the day I act, you will tread upon the wicked as if they were dust under your feet...” – Mal 4:2-3

Let's pray with that in mind...

Gracious Father, Lord of Heaven's Armies...Search me, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in your way forever. Claim all of me again today by your powerful love. Drive out apathy and indifference and restore to me the joy of life with you so that this city might be drawn into your amazing grace. Through Jesus Christ we pray...Amen.

This bit's just for me.