

Sermon on **Malachi 3:1-7a** for 2nd Sunday in Advent 12.8.24
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

Did you clean for company this Thanksgiving, or are you getting things ready for company in these days before Christmas. I don't want to raise a panic, but these days are for getting ready in a lot of ways. I once saw a show called "Tidying Up with Marie Kondo." While one might not agree with everything said or put forth in the show the premise was timely – learning skills to declutter your house – keeping what is important and letting go of, getting rid of, the rest.

God's Word to his people through the prophet Malachi was about cleaning up his people. They had returned to the promised land and rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem and the temple. But some of their old sins were taking them down, the idolatries, the sexual sins, the lying, the greed, the pride, and bigotry, sins that still lurk within our hearts sadly. God says it is time for a cleaning, and God will do it.

A Real Christmas is Rooted in Repentance.

1) The Lord loves us enough to come to us.

2) The Lord loves us enough to refine us and return us to himself.

"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. "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty. "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty."

God's people accused him of not bringing justice on the godless. They wanted the Messiah to come judge. But God was not unjust. God shows them that they were refusing to look in the mirror and see that they needed to repent of their own sins which had found a home in their hearts and were taking them away from God. It was time to repent.

God had a plan for his people. First the forerunner, whom we now know as John the Baptist, will come. Then the Messiah, the Savior, Jesus Christ, will come. John brought a *baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins* (Mark 1:4). He spoke to all the levels of society from the common folk to the religious elites. The message was clear though – be ready for his coming, *repent*, turn from sin to your Savior.

"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. I love Christmas time – the anticipation of the greatest miracle – the incarnation – God takes on flesh, becomes truly man and he is also truly God. And why? For us! He *came to seek and to save what was lost* (Luke 19:10). We want to be ready. "O Lord, *how shall I meet you, how welcome you aright?*" we sing (CW 324). God gives us the way to be ready and rejoice at our Savior's coming. **A Real Christmas is Rooted in Repentance. He loves us enough to come to us.**

"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." We are not worthy to stand in his presence because of our sin. God's Law shows us our sin, that we were *dead in sin* (Eph.2:1), that our hearts were *hostile* to God by nature (Romans 8:7). We could not stand in his presence. But God in his grace and mercy made us worthy. God sent his Son to stand in for us living a spotless life that needed no cleansing. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one*

who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He sent his Son to stand in for us suffering an eternity in hell for our failure and sin, “*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor. 5:21). We have been saved completely by his perfect life and innocent sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection. Now what about our life today? In love he works repentance in our hearts. He turns us from our sin and to him in faith and trust. He continues to work on us each day as he aligns our lives and hearts to stay focused on him. **A Real Christmas is Rooted in Repentance. He loves us enough to come to us.**

The Lord loves us enough to refine us and return us to himself. How do you get rid of a wart? You can cover it up, put some wart removing liquid on it, or you can freeze it off. Kids don’t like warts, but they don’t always like the remedy either, might even be scared of the sting, or the remedy. But they need it. A little boy may be afraid of the soap in the bathtub. It could sting when it gets a little in the eyes or sting when it gets on that scrape or cut. But they need it to get rid of dirt, stink. They need it. We need Jesus all the time. Jesus likens himself to *soap*, or a *refiner’s fire*. He refines us because he loves us. He gives us crosses to bear, blessings and struggles to point us back to himself constantly. He doesn’t want us to be lost again like those who love sin rather than the Savior. He gives a terrible warning to those who love sin rather than Him. “*So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,*” says the LORD Almighty.” They will be the dross that is skimmed away or the grime and dirt that goes down the drain, sadly lost forever in hell.

God speaks these words to you because he is faithful to you and he wants you to be with him for all eternity. Now is the time to repent, to look to God’s Word and apply it to your life. Why? Because he wants you. He has made you his own and treat you like *gold* and *silver*– sitting patiently as a refiner, purifying you of all that makes you less valuable and less beautiful. He turns the heat up and lifts the dross of sin and guilt and temptation and skims it away from you with his forgiveness and love. He heats you up with the crosses you bear to help you see just how worthless and empty greed is, lust is, idolatry and false doctrine and worldly ideas and ideologies, how empty bullying and bigotry are so that you succumb to them no longer and send them away. He returns your heart to him so that you live in his love, think, live, work, give, help, hear his Word for the right motive – because of his love for you. “*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.*”

Sometimes when I clean, I resort to the quick clean tricks – stuff it all in a closet, push it under the bed and hang the bedspread a little lower – not dealing with the junk. The interesting thing about the cleaning show I mentioned is that Marie was trying to teach people the keys to not only tidying up their house for a week, but keeping it clean. The interesting thing about Jesus is that he does not stop working on us, refining us, because he cleans us to dwell in our hearts not for a week, but for eternity. Thank God for his cleaning. **A Real Christmas is Rooted in Repentance. 1) The Lord loves us enough to come to us. 2) The Lord loves us enough to refine us and return us to himself.**