

14 March 2018
Lent 4 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

Jesu Juva

“Return to the Lord . . . Who Does Not Change”

Text: Malachi 3:6-12; Matthew 6:25-33

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Return to the Lord your God, who is gracious and merciful, who redeems you, who restores you, and who will raise you up. That’s what we have considered so far in our Lenten midweek meditations. Our Lord’s faithfulness, our Lord’s promises, our Lord’s work for us, and His desire that we return to Him and receive these gifts from His hand. Good stuff.

But all these words and promises, all this work, all of this would be of no use and no value to us, were it not for this next Word of God, the one we are considering tonight and that we heard from the prophet Malachi: Return to the Lord your God, **who does not change**.

For what good would be a God who speaks a word to us, but later takes it back; who does something for us, but later changes His mind. That is a God you cannot count on. That is a God you cannot even know. A God who is one way today, but tomorrow may be quite different. A God who says one thing today, but tomorrow may speak something completely different. Which is real? Which is true? You could not know.

The good news for us tonight is that God is not like that. **He does not change**. When He speaks, it is true and sure. What He promises, He will do. You can count on Him and know Him. Which is exactly what we need. Someone we can depend on living in an undependable world. Something steadfast in a world of change. So good words from Malachi tonight.

Malachi, who was the next-to-last of the Old Testament prophets. John the Baptist was officially the last of the Old Testament prophets, even though his story is in the New Testament. But John was the last of the Old Testament prophets because he was the last prophet leading up to Jesus; the last prophet before Jesus would make all things new. But Malachi is the last before him, and after Malachi there would be silence from God for some 400 years. Until God would speak again through John, but even more importantly, through His Son (Hebrews 1:1).

That fact makes these words of Malachi even more important; words that the people

would cling to in that 400 year time of silence. That God doesn't change. That His word and promises don't change. That this word of His won't change, this word that said: ***Return to me, and I will return to you.***

Specifically, at the time of Malachi, the issue was the ***tithes and contributions*** of Israel. They were no longer giving them. It's not that God needs what we give Him - He's God! Everything is His anyway! - it's that we need to give to God. Tithes and contributions are for our benefit. Not in a *quid pro quo* sense - we give so that God will give more - no! We give to acknowledge that our Father in heaven has given us everything first, and this is our response. We give because we believe this. We give because we believe that God will provide for our every need. And we give to lessen our grip on the things of this world, that we cling not to them, but only to Him. And so failing to give is an indication that not all is right with us in our hearts. That we do not believe. That we are clinging to the wrong things. That what we have is not a gift from God, but what we've earned and deserve. Malachi is pointing out not just a behaviour problem in Israel, but a heart problem. A faith problem.

And so with these words from Malachi, God is calling and inviting Israel back to faith. To believe in Him. To believe in His goodness. To believe in Him as their loving Father.

So ***test me***, God says. Test me and see if I will not provide. Again, not as a reward for their giving, but because this is who God is. If they give they will not lack.

Because God does not change. This is what He had done before. Think of the people of Israel in the wilderness. God had brought them out of Egypt, He had led them through the Red Sea, He provided manna for them to eat, and their clothes and shoes did not wear out - for forty years! And all this He did not because Israel was so faithful and good, for they weren't. They grumbled against Him all the time. So as their loving Father He disciplined them, but He also never stopped providing for them. Not because of who they were, but because of who He is.

But Satan is always tempting us to unbelief. To doubt the goodness and love of our Father in heaven and so turn away from Him. So return, God calls out. Return, Malachi calls out. Return is our theme this Lenten season. Return to your Father in repentance for your unbelief and faith in His promises.

This is what Jesus was really talking about as well in the reading from Matthew we heard tonight. Why do you worry about what you will eat and what you will wear? Look at how God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. They are preaching to you of the goodness and love of your Father. And if He cares for them, will He not much more care for you? Of course He will. He has, and He will.

So as it was for Israel, so it is for us. It is a faith problem. We do not believe as we

should. That is why we grow anxious, that is why we don't give more, that is why we turn away from God. Oh, some days, some times, our faith is strong! But then there are those others days when we are quite weak, we our faith flounders. Or in others words, we change. Day to day, sometimes hour to hour.

So, again, how good to hear these words from God our Father tonight: ***I the Lord do not change. Therefore we are not consumed.*** God made us promises and He's sticking to them. He promised to send a Saviour, and He did. He promised us forgiveness, and He is. And He promised us life, and He is giving that, too - life now, and life forever.

Which doesn't mean life will be easy. Sin is still in this world, wreaking its havoc. As it did in the Garden, is now, and will in the future. But it has an end. When our Lord returns and sets us free from sin and death. When our bodies are transformed and fit for everlasting life. We have that promise, too, which God will not change.

So in the midst of a world of change, of bodies that change, and people that change, we have a God **who does not change**. A faithful Father you can count on. Return to Him, and receive this too: *the joy of being His child*.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.