

Sunday 17th November 2019

2nd Sunday before Advent

Green



Collect

O Lord, raise up, we pray, your power and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness we are grievously hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen**

Malachi 4:1-2 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Great Day of the LORD

4 [a] ¹“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. ² 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.

Footnote: a. Malachi 4:1 – Chapter 4:1–6 is Chapter 3:19–24 in Hebrew

COMMENT: The name Malachi literally means “my messenger” but we do not know whether this was actually the name of the prophet. The rebuilding of the temple had already been completed (circa 515 BC). The keeping of the covenant relationship with God was the great concern of this little known prophet of the period soon after the return of the exiles from Babylon. To maintain the sanctity of the temple and its sacrificial rituals has become the chief expression of this relationship. To achieve this had become the chief role of the priesthood in difficult times during the first hundred years or so after the exile. In fact, the priests had replaced the monarchy as the chief authorities and representatives of the nation as well as serving a strictly religious function. In this passage, speaking for the LORD, the prophet utters a grave warning that all unfaithful Israelites would be destroyed like the stubble left and burned after the harvest. The season of harvest in Palestine comes in the late spring or early summer. In the intense heat of summer may indeed feel like the oven metaphorically describing what awaits those unworthy of the covenant relationship. The colourful phrase “root and branch” has come into the English language to describe the total destruction envisaged. In verse 2, the threat to the unfaithful vanishes as a totally different set of metaphors describes how the faithful will be rewarded for their righteousness. They will receive the welcome refreshment and healing the rising sun of the early morning brings. Christians have interpreted this promise that for those who revere God’s name “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing on its wings” as a prophecy fulfilled by Jesus. Charles Wesley used the metaphor in verse 3 of his famous exultation of the coming of Christ in “Hark! the herald angels sing” and also in the hymn “Christ whose glory fills the skies”.

Destruction of the Temple

⁵ And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” ⁷ And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” ⁸ And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

Jesus Foretells Wars and Persecution

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers^[a] and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Footnote: a. or *parents and brothers and sisters*.

COMMENT: Long before Jesus’ ministry, a rich eschatological (= the advent of God’s new age at the end of time) tradition existed in Judaism. The apostolic church took over this tradition and reinterpreted it as being fulfilled in the messianic age Jesus inaugurated. After the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem about 40 years after the Resurrection, Mark expressed this tradition in words of prophecy ostensibly spoken by Jesus himself (Mark 13). Parts of this passage in Luke 21 had their source in Mark’s gospel; other parts came from Luke’s own sources. Verses 5-11 and 16-17 belong to Mark, while 12-15 and 18-19 are material only found in Luke. The two are so cleverly fused as to be almost indistinguishable. In Luke Jesus predicts the persecutions which his disciples would encounter, even to betrayal by members of their own families. This may well have been happening in Luke’s own day. Jesus had also promised that they would be given the words with which to defend themselves before their persecutors (cf. Acts 4:8ff). Despite this, they would not be harmed (verse 18). There were of course exceptions, and some disciples were called to lose their lives - for example Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 7:54ff) and he also recorded that James the Apostle had been executed by Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2). The call for some to be ready to lose their lives had already been noted by Luke; Chapter 9:24 and Chapter 17:33. The purpose of this message of Jesus was to warn of judgment to come and to encourage the faithful that come what may; God is still

in control of historical events. Instead of predicting what would inevitably happen in coming troubles and persecutions, he was warning that things would get worse before they got better. As with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God has a purpose in which all events of human time and place are being gathered up. In the end God's reign will come to pass as God determined from the beginning. In the coming of Jesus as a human being into the world where human history takes place, God has inaugurated this reign of sovereign love. The Spirit of God is now at work within human beings and all their myriad relationships, good and bad, to bring about what God ultimately intends for creation. Human history is still unfinished business, but it also is the place where God is at work. The full consummation of God's purpose is yet to come. Eschatology attempts to describe what this consummation will be like. What can be taken as true in all of this is that God reigns. We live in God's world, the God who came in Jesus and is coming to complete God's historical purpose of reconciling all creation to God's eternal love.

Psalm 98 *Cantate Domino* Grail Psalter

℟️ The Lord comes to rule the peoples with fairness.

¹ *A Psalm.*

Sing a new song to the Lord
for he has worked wonders.
His right and hand his holy arm
have brought salvation. ℟️

² The Lord has made known his salvation;
has shown his justice to the nations.

³ He has remembered his truth and love
for the house of Israel. ℟️

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

⁴ Shout to the Lord, all the earth,
ring out your joy. ℟️

⁵ Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp
with the sound of music.

⁶ With trumpets and the sound of the horn
acclaim the King, the Lord. ℟️

⁷ Let the sea and all within it, thunder;
the world, and all its peoples.

⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands
and the hills ring out their joy. ℟️

⁹ at the presence of the Lord: for he comes,
he comes to rule the earth.
He will rule the world with justice
and the peoples with fairness. ℟️

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This is one of a series of six so-called “enthronement psalms” psalms probably used in celebrating the sovereignty of the LORD at the New Year festival. It uses different sounds in nature as well as the human voice and musical instruments as the means of praise. (See Psalms 47, 93, 96-99) The reason for such an outburst of rejoicing lay in the mighty saving acts of the LORD extending in mercy to Israel. Their purpose was to draw the attention of the whole world and thus inform all peoples of what the LORD was doing through this specially favoured people. Verse 4 identifies the songs of praise as worshipers parade into the temple. In verses. 5-6, musical instruments add to joyous cacophony. Finally, all nature and all creatures are summoned to support the noisy disharmony. The idea of the LORD as a monarch to be enthroned each New Year conveyed the spiritual truth of a supreme being to whose will the people owed obedience. This concept went as far back as the times of Gideon (Judges 8:23) and presumably also reflected the double roles of an ancient Middle Eastern monarch as ruler and chief religious figurehead or priest. The Israelites had adopted this concept after their settlement in Canaan. The LORD was their King-God similar to the monarchs of other cultures. In the post-exilic period when there were no reigning monarchs, the annual ritual of the enthronement of the LORD has taken the place of royal coronations. Psalm 72 refers to a coronation when the monarch ascended Israel’s throne as the representative and “son” of the LORD. From these customs and practices came the concept of the saving messiah, so familiar to Christians in the gospel depictions of Jesus as the Messiah and King of the Jews.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you sent him to redeem us from sin and death and to make us inheritors of everlasting life; that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may with joy behold his appearing, and in confidence may stand before him.

Post Communion

Father in heaven, who sent your Son to redeem the world and will send him again to be our judge: give us grace so to imitate him in the humility and purity of his first coming that, when he comes again, we may be ready to greet him with joyful love and firm faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine upon you, scatter the darkness from before your path, and make you ready to meet him when he comes in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**