

Last Sunday of the Church Year 11/20/16  
Malachi 3:13-18 C

**“YOUR WORDS HAVE BEEN HARD AGAINST ME SAYS THE LORD. BUT YOU SAY, ‘HOW HAVE WE SPOKEN AGAINST YOU?’”**

“Is God Dead?” proclaimed the cover of the April 8, 1966, edition of Time magazine. And yes, it stirred a lot of controversy. But for us poor sinners, it was nothing new. We judge God by the standard of our fallen human reason. The problem with that is that God doesn’t work according to our reason and senses. And, so we fashion a new image and concept of God that fits with what we want. And in doing that, what we are doing is speaking words of defiance, words telling God we are a whole lot smarter than He is.

What about you? Even as a baptized and redeemed child of God, do you ever speak harsh words against God? Do you ever put God to the test? Sure ya do! You do it when you look at your neighbor’s stuff and you demand of God, “Where’s my stuff? I’ve worked hard. When do I get what’s coming to me?” Or when you spend your retirement dollars on a sick spouse rather than the American dream, or when it is your child or grandchild diagnosed with an incurable sickness. Then, your words are these, “Hello God? Where are you? Don’t you care? Are you really there?” We speak harsh words of defiance and discontentment and anger against God, perhaps even thinking that we can cajole Him to doing what we want, as though God were nothing but a magic genie.

“Your words have been hard against me,” the Lord God said to Israel. “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? ... Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape’”

(vs. 14-15). What's true of Israel, is true of us in 2016, My Dear Friends in Christ.

In the doubts of our faith and the despair of our feelings, we think God doesn't care. We come to church, put our offerings in the plate, teach God's Word to our children, live our lives according to the light of the Commandments, and ... and ... we don't seem to fare in this world any better than the pagan unbelievers. In fact, honestly, it seems the wicked prosper and succeed, they receive the world's wealth and the masses' praise. Maybe we are wasting our time with this whole Christian thing. Maybe, just maybe, God may not be dead, but maybe He is irrelevant for our lives today.

The Lord, through Malachi, bids us look up from ourselves to Him in faith, to fear Him, to repent and stand in awe of Him, and to trust His promises. He bids us to look back and remember all His works for us. Even when it seems God is far away, when it seems God doesn't care or that He doesn't even exist, He leads us to remember His promises, to remember that He will never forget His people. We have no need to test God or speak against Him, because **GOD ALWAYS KEEPS HIS PROMISES.**

Quite appropriate for this Last Sunday of the Church Year, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. It's God's last word to Israel before the fulfillment of His greatest promise. Next time God comes to His people; it's going to be in person -- in the person of the promised baby in Bethlehem. It's going to be 400 years of waiting, but He *is* going to come. What God's Word says, happens.

At the beginning of creation, God said, "Let there be," and during each of the six days of creation, there was. The LORD shut righteous

Noah and his family into the ark through the flood waters to dry ground. He delivered Israel from the land of death to the Promised Land. Through the hand of the mighty man of valor, Gideon, God delivered Israel from the hand of the Midianites. He shut the mouths of lions to save Daniel. And, the Lord God promised through Isaiah, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is 7:14). That promise was fulfilled in the manger of Bethlehem. God keeps His promises.

And because God keeps His promises, He can say, "They shall be mine...in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him" (v. 17).

The IRONY of that is we are God's treasured possession because He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. God so loved us, even when we spoke hard words against Him, that He sent His own Son be our Savior. That Son was born of Virgin mother to be human just like us, and God laid on Him all our sin, including our hard words, our words of defiance, ingratitude, and anger, and led Him to the death of the cross. There, when we see the very Son of God nailed to that wooden rod of torture, we see the compassion of God, we see how much God really does love us and care for us.

Because Jesus died on that cross, we are forgiven. Gone is His cleansing blood are all our harsh words, our words of defiance, ingratitude, and anger against God, and all our sins of thought, word, and deed.

Beneath that cross, you can cry in faith, Jesus has "purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, **that I may be His own.**" You are the sons and daughters of the King. You are His treasured possession.

In the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, our faith may be put to the test by our circumstances, but God's purpose is only to refine us, to remove anything that might separate us from him, and to show us ever more clearly Christ *for us*. Even when we forget, He remembers us.

An atheist and a Christian were once having a conversation about the existence of God. The atheist said, "If there is a God, may he prove himself by striking me dead right now." Nothing happened. "You see, there is not God." To which the Christian responded, "You've only proved that He is a gracious God.

In His grace, God makes you His treasured possession, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified and putting His name upon you in the new birth of your baptism. There, in that water and Word, He unites you with the death and resurrection of Jesus. And, He gives you His Spirit as the down payment on all His promises, so that you walk by faith this day and long for the day of the resurrection of all flesh.

By His Word, He has compassion on you. He speaks the words of forgiveness over you, removing your sin from you as far as the east is from the west.

In the Sacrament of the Altar, as often as we "do this in remembrance" of Him, He remembers His promise, and places into your mouth the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

So whatever your circumstance in life this day, you go out from here as God's treasured possession. You live the promises kept. You have Jesus as your King, who rules and governs all things for your good. You have peace with God, because Jesus has reconciled all things to Himself through the blood of the cross. And, as this Last Sunday of the Church Year directs us to look forward to Jesus' return, yes, when He returns, "You

shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him” (v. 18).

Be of good cheer, Dear Child of God, He has not forgotten you!