

Dear Friends in Christ,

The moment I realized I would be writing a sermon for The Last Sunday of the Church Year the words *You've got to be kidding!* came to mind. Along with that was *How time flies!* And along with that the fact that the next twelve months won't fly by any slower. Although the Advent Season doesn't start until next Sunday, Frank Wilson's insight is appropriate:

"The word 'Advent' means 'coming' and refers to the coming of our Lord on Christmas day.

"But there is also another side to it. As our Lord came once, He will come again. As there was a first Advent, so there will also be a second." (Frank E. Wilson, *An Outline of the Christian Year*, Morehouse-Barlow Co., New York, 1967, p. 23)

Jesus said, "And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." (Matt. 24:22) Considering the way things are maybe we want them to *fly by* faster - all kidding aside!

The Last Sunday of the Church Year directs us to . . .

THE DAY WHEN...

I. It's All Mapped Out.

"Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you said, 'How have we spoken against you?' 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? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evil does not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'" (vss. 13-15)

I wonder, are the words, "Evil does not only prosper but they put God to the test..." - I wonder if those words are on everyone's mind? It seems that so many have been...well...you know... *getting by with murder*. And here's what kicks us: God says of such thinking, "Your words have been hard against me...". What words? These words from the mouths of His people: "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?...Evil does not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape."

But, look, God didn't promise His people that their walk would be easy and, from a worldly point of view, successful. Do you recall the words of Asaph from Psalm 73? "For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind...They set their mouths against the heavens...". (Ps. 73:3,5,9a) And note this insight on human nature: "And they say, 'How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?'" (vs. 11) Well, God can't know everything about everything, right? Have you ever had thoughts similar to Asaph's? And God comes before us, when we think these things, and says, "Your words have been hard against me...". How about this: "You know better!"

Consider this: The Scriptures tell us what this world is and where it is ultimately headed. It's all mapped out! Should we really be that surprised? We know this! Maybe we've spent too much time striking a comfortable partnership with this world. Maybe we've allowed ourselves to become comfortably deluded by the deluded.

Asaph was shaken out of his misunderstanding. Let's make sure we are. He said:

"But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly

you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms." (Ps. 73:16-19)

II. God Gathers His Own.

Our text goes on to say:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. (vs. 16)

There's that place recorded in II Kings, centuries before Malachi, where King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, were out to kill the great prophet of God, Elijah. We're told, "(Elijah) was afraid and he arose and ran for his life..." (I Kings 19:3a) In part, he had enough, as he would later express it in these words: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life..." (I Kings 19:4b) He would go on to say "For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only (I only!), am left..." (14b)

And then came God's response: "Go, return on your way..." (vs. 15b) The NIV puts it this way: "Go back the way you came..." God wasn't particularly sympathetic and, basically, told him to get back to the task of proclaiming the Word. And there was a reason. God said, "...I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." (vs. 18) That's astounding! Only seven thousand people belonged to God! It has been historically noted, "Put another way, more than 99 percent of Jewish people of the Northern Kingdom worshiped the Baal." (Jewish History.Org)

And next, at the time of Malachi a similar event. It has been noted, "As there were 7,000 in Israel at Ahab's time...so there were also in Malachi's age believing *children of God, who loved and feared Him.*" (Theodore Laetsch, *Minor Prophets, Concordia Classic Commentary Series*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, fourth printing, 1975, p. 541)

And now our time. You can forget the statistics. The church throughout the world grows smaller. Perhaps, what we don't want to hear is the fact that the Scriptures said this is what would happen. But God will gather His very own, just as He did at the time of Malachi. As our text says, "...a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name."

God's people were few in number at the time of Elijah. They were few in number at the time of Malachi. They will be few when Christ returns. Jesus said, "...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18:8) You can forget the statistics. But we must never forget the forgiveness of sin and promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ!

Nothing has changed. It's why we're together. And you can't miss it: "...a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name." The faithful Jews were assured that God would not forget them, in spite of their trials. And it is the same for us, as John writes, "The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life." (Rev. 3:5) You see? The Book of Life. A scroll - a book - of Remembrance.

III. The Day When...

Thus, from our text God says:

“They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in **the day when** I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and one who does not serve him.” (vss. 17-18)

“The distinction between the righteous and the wicked.” The righteous being those who see their sin and gladly receive God’s covering and cleansing of sin through the Blood of Christ.

And regardless of how we see the tough moments of life; those moments when you wonder why God is allowing whatever is happening to you to happen; those moments when there seems to be no answers forthcoming, God is always there for us. Once again, those familiar words that sometimes seem to be light years away from us:

“When you pass through the waters (not if, but when), I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; and when you walk through fire (not if, but when) you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God...”. (Isaiah 43:2-3a)

It is the Lord our God who gathers His people (us) in the midst of a sorely afflicted and dying world. And it stands there as a sure reminder; God’s promise: “They (and that includes us) shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in **the day when** I make up my treasured possession...”.

Are you ready - for **the day when** - He returns?

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

STEWARDSHIP

November 20, 2016

Malachi 3:13-18: ***“The Day When . . .”***

I. It's All Mapped Out.

II. God Gathers His Own.

III. The Day When...

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*