

Peace requires preparation.¹ For example, imagine that you are a student and you have a big test coming up. What do you need to do? Prepare! If you have studied, if you have prepared, you might still be a little nervous, but you'll have a lot more peace than you would if you didn't study. If you have studied for the test, if have prepared, then you'll have more peace going into the test. Peace requires preparation.

We know that Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead. In our passage today Malachi asks, "Who can endure the day of his coming?" The answer is only one who is prepared. The one who is prepared can have peace as we look forward to that day when Jesus returns. Today we are going to talk about how we are prepared for that day.

Our passage says that God prepares us for that day by sending us messengers. There are two messengers mentioned in our Bible passage for today. Our Bible passage for today was written about 400 years before Jesus was born. And God says that he is going to send two messengers. The first messenger is John the Baptist. God says, "**See I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.**" (Malachi 3:1) The New Testament identifies this messenger as John the Baptist. John the Baptist prepared people for Jesus to come by telling them to repent, to be sorry for their sins. He also baptized them for the forgiveness of their sins. And he also pointed people to Jesus as the one who take away their sins. One time John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and said, "**Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29). So John the Baptist prepared people for judgment day by telling them to repent of their sins, by baptizing them for the forgiveness of their sins, and by pointing people to Jesus as their Savior from sin.

And that's how we also prepare for Jesus to return. We repent of our sins. We are truly sorry for them and turn away from them. We trust the promises God made to us in baptism when he washed away our sins and made us members of his family. And we trust in Jesus as the one who took away our sins by his death on the cross. When we are prepared by repenting of our sins, by trusting God's promises in baptism, and by looking to Jesus as our Savior, then we can have peace as we look forward to Jesus' return.

God prepares us by sending us messengers. The first messenger in this passage is John the Baptist. The second messenger in this passage is Jesus himself. It says, "**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.**" (Malachi 3:1) Here Jesus is called "**the messenger of the covenant.**" A covenant is an agreement between two people. The covenant or agreement that God makes with us in Jesus is that he promises to forgive our sins on the basis of Jesus' shed blood. At the Lord's Supper Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20) Jesus is the messenger of the covenant and in this covenant God promises to forgive our sins on the basis of Jesus' blood shed on the cross. Jesus did the ultimate thing to prepare us for judgment day. He shed his blood to pay for all of our sins.

Christ does even more to prepare us for Judgment Day. You see. If we live in unrepentant sin, that can lull us into being unprepared for his return. So our passage says that to keep us prepared for Judgment Day, Christ does the work of "**a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.**" (Malachi 3:2) A fire refines silver. It burns off all of the impurities. Our sins could lull us into being unprepared for Judgment Day and so Jesus burns those sins off of us like a refiner's fire. How does Jesus do that? Through his messengers, his pastors, he warns us to stop sinning. And just like a fire hurts, it can be hard to stop sinning. But when Jesus commands us to stop sinning he's burning off something that might keep us from being prepared on the last day. You see Jesus doesn't want anything to come between you and him. He doesn't want anything to hinder your relationship with him and certainly doesn't want anything to keep you out of heaven. And so when he sees sin in your life he burns it off by commanding you to stop. He's a like a refiner's fire. Jesus loves us so much that he wants to burn off anything in our lives that might keep us away from him forever.

This is what our Gospel was talking about when it said, "**Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.**" (Luke 3:4-5) If there are blockades preventing Jesus from traveling the path into our heart, they must be removed. Mountains of pride and self-righteousness need to be

¹ Some of the words and thoughts in this sermon are taken from the C18 "Sermon Thoughts for Advent and Christmas."

leveled. Valleys of despair need to be filled in by the good news of God's love. And any unrepentant sin needs to be removed by the refining fire of God's word because unrepentant sin could separate us from Christ.

Our passage goes on to say that God saved us and refines us so that we might serve him. It says, **"He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who bring offerings in righteousness"** (Malachi 3:3).

The Levites were the priests in the Old Testament. In the New Testament every believer is a priest. The apostle Peter said, **"You are a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"** (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

How can you serve God as his New Testament priests? Well, in the Old Testament priests were always concerned about other people. They taught other people God's word. They prayed for other people. They presented offerings on behalf of other people. As God's New Testament priests we want the people around us to also be prepared for the Christ's return.

That's what the WELS C18 program is all about. C18 (Christmas Eve 2018) is a synod-wide program where the WELS wants to invite one million unchurched people to our churches on Christmas Eve so that they can hear the gospel and be saved. Do you have any friends who don't go to church? You can invite them to come with you to our Christmas Eve service. Do have any relatives who don't have a church or maybe have fallen away from church? You can invite them to come with you this Christmas Eve. We want our friends and relatives and neighbors to have the same peace that we have. It's like it said in our liturgy for Advent: **"In the peace of God we go to the world – to our friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors."**

We have peace as we look forward to the last day and we want others to have that same peace. But peace requires preparation. All people need to be prepared by hearing God's word. They need to hear the good news that a Savior has come for them to save them.

Peace requires preparation. Typically, big days are enjoyed only after long hours of hard work. A Christmas party is fun, but is preceded by hours of planning. A wedding is a joyous event, but first comes months of hard work. We sometimes erroneously view this life as the "main event." But it is not. The party comes later. This is the time when God prepares us and others to meet our Savior. And when God prepares us through his word and through the good news of our Savior, then we can have peace. Amen.