

St. Paul: On The Same page

11.17.13 Week #273

Day One: Malachi 3:13-18

"You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD.

"Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'"

"You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.'"

In the old "Calvin and Hobbes" cartoons, they would sometimes play Calvinball, which involved upside down rules on Opposite Day, and many other random changes. To escape the consequences of his failure, Calvin would keep changing the rules in a vain attempt to win.

Malachi says that this is what God's people do to him. We turn his word upside down. Trying to get away from our responsibility for sin, we accuse God of being the one who failed. We are good, but he is the one who is unjust!

"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:32-33

That's what we're doing when we question "why" God allowed things to be as they are. Sometimes it does seem as if God is allowing injustice to stand. Nevertheless, not even our complaining can change God. He will be just – and he will be merciful – even when we are unfair to him.

Just imagine, if God really could be unfair, what would this world be like? Give thanks to God for his justice and mercy, even with it's hard for us to understand.

Prayer: Father, give me patience with your justice. I know that you may move slowly as it seems to me. Grant that I may be declared just because of Jesus' death for me. Amen.

Day Two: Colossians 1:13-20

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Have you ever tried to find words to describe a night sky full of stars? Or the Grand Canyon? Or the ocean? It's impossible to capture their grandeur and immensity in words.

Paul attempts to describe God's greatness in words. And he does it by pointing to Jesus. All of God's greatness, his power, his authority, his holiness, and his love and mercy are expressed finally in Jesus. Read those words again.

If an author succeeds in describing the beauty of nature in a poem or a song, we might be deeply moved. But even if we know how beautiful or majestic a mountain or a stream may be, that provides no comfort for us because those things are indifferent to us. The mountain does not care if we live or die. The stream does not care if we swim in it or drown in it.

But the Son is the image of the invisible God. Through the Son we see what God is like, his power and majesty, and his love and mercy. All the powers and rulers of the earth were created through him, and he holds all things together. And this is the one who loves us. This is the one who came for us, and through his life and his death we have life forever.

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, I am in awe of your power and glory. But even more do I stand in wonder at your mercy, your love that would leave heaven and embrace my humanity. Lord, make me one with you, forever. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 23:27-43

Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰Then “they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’” ³¹For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”
...Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

Even in April it can be dangerous to start a fire. But in November, when everything is dry, it can be catastrophic. A popping ember or flying spark can begin a fire that very quickly gets out of control. Jesus says that evil can be the same way.

As the world gets more and more “dry” – as the end

approaches and more people are rejecting God’s Word – evil finds ready fuel. Terrible murders, brutal wars, the abuse of women and children, drug addictions and diseases, the killing of unborn children by the millions, all these things have become commonplace.

But... the story does not stop with Jesus’ warning. It goes on to his victory over death and over sin for us. Our world may indeed be evil, but we have hope because of Jesus’ triumph!

Even in his suffering, Jesus gave forgiveness. Nothing could stop him from this because it was the purpose for all his life, his death, and his resurrection. In these terrible events we see God’s judgment against sin, carried by Jesus. And we see his mercy, and his victory!

“What kind of love is this,” one of our hymns says, that the Father could allow his Son to suffer like this for those who had rejected him?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I am one of those whose sins caused your death. But you did not hesitate. Your love for me was greater than my sin. Fill me with love for you today, and for all whom you love. Amen.

Day Four: Happy New Year!

Next Sunday is the very last Sunday of the church year.

In order to teach God's word effectively, we divide the year into two parts, the "festival" season and the non-festival season. The festival season starts in Advent (in December) with lessons remembering the Old Testament believers who were waiting for the Savior to be born. So we will hear about promises of Jesus' birth, and see how God prepared things for Jesus' birth.

Then, of course, we celebrate Christmas, and in the Epiphany season (Epiphany means "revealed") our Bible readings will focus on how Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God by his teaching and his miracles.

Then, with Ash Wednesday, we start the 6 weeks of Lent. We'll read Scriptures about Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem and his getting ready to suffer and die for us. And all of that will culminate in Holy Week – Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.

After Easter, Jesus appeared to his disciples for 40 more days, so we will focus on those lessons for 7 more weeks until we remember his Ascension to heaven, and finally the sending of the Holy Spirit to the disciples on Pentecost. After that the long non-festival season runs through the summer and fall until... today.

Happy New Year! Does it feel like New Year? Probably not. There isn't a lot of drinking or horn blowing when we start a new church year. But there is preparation.

"Stir up, O Lord," one of our Advent psalms begins. We ask God to stir up our hearts to love him. To wake us up so that we will hear his word. And while he is stirring us up, we might begin stirring in the kitchen for Advent and Christmas cooking.

We prepare to give gifts. We decorate our homes. But I pray that you will prepare to receive Jesus' gifts, and that you will decorate your heart to be filled with him. Please set aside time for Advent devotions in this new year.