

Sermon for The Last Sunday of the Church Year

Date: November 24, 2019

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Malachi 3:13-18

Epistle Reading: Colossians 1:13-20

Gospel Reading: Luke 23:27-43

Sermon Text: Malachi 3:13-18

Sermon Title: The End

Introit: Psalm 56:10-13; Antiphon: Psalm 56:4

Hymns:

LSB 680 – Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise

LSB 633 – At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

LSB 802 – Immortal, Invisible God Only Wise

LSB 610 – Lord Jesus, Think On Me

LSB 837 – Lift High the Cross

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Creative Worship



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau
KAUS 1480 AM Sun. 9:00am



Text: Malachi 3:13-18

“Your words against me are hard,” says the Lord.

“You ask, ‘How have we spoken against you?’

“You have said, ‘It is pointless to serve God. What do we gain if we meet his standards or if we walk around feeling sorry for what we’ve done? So now we call arrogant people blessed. Not only are evildoers encouraged, they even test God and get away with it.’”

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord paid attention and listened. A book was written in his presence to be a reminder to those who feared the Lord and respected his name.

“They will be mine,” says the Lord of Armies. “On that day I will make them my special possession. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. Then you will again see the difference between righteous people and wicked people, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him.

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May God's eternal grace, His gift of peace, and His limitless mercy, reside in your life always in Jesus' name. Amen.

The title of this sermon is, "The End." It is, I suppose, a fitting title to a sermon that brings with it the end of the Church Year. We still have one more service this Church Year. It will be Wednesday night when we celebrate Thanksgiving Day Eve. Then it's "The End." The end of the Church Year. Next Sunday we start fresh and new, like a new born babe. In fact exactly like a new born babe, one born in a manger. Starting next Sunday we'll begin preparing for that wonderful event.

Today however we are looking, not to the beginning, but to the end. Not the end of Jesus' life on Earth, nor the end of our own lives on this Earth, but the very end, the end of all things. It could come anytime. It could come today, tomorrow, or many many years from now. We don't know when that day will come. In fact Scripture tells us only the Father knows when that day will arrive.¹ So my question to you is, "Does it matter?" Is it really all that important that we think, or talk, about that Last Day. Is Judgment Day really all that important when our world is in so much chaos? Aren't there more important things at which we should be looking?

It's been some years now... It happened in 1999, in St. Petersburg, Russia. It was in a prison, a women's prison. That day the prison had a visitor. His name is John Reehl. He along with his interpreter, a man named Constantine walked into the prison. They were told they could go anywhere they wanted in the prison. There was only one cell that was off limits, one cell they were forbidden enter.

Now you might expect it would be the cell that contained the most horrific and violent criminals. The cell that was just too dangerous for anyone but trained armed guards to enter. Many of these women have lives filled with pain and violence. You would expect that some of them would be too hardened, too callous. That was not the cell.

The only cell they were forbidden to enter did not contain the most violent criminals, it contained women who have an especially contagious form of tuberculosis and AIDS. Most women in Russian prisons get visitors anyway. These women, the living dead, get none.

The authorities of that prison, however, did not know John Reehl. John Reehl was representing the Orphan Grain Train, an organization that our own congregation contributes to in various ways. This organization works very hard to respond to the needs of people who are in desperate and difficult situations. John

¹ Matthew 24:36

Reehl was also representing his Savior that day. A Savior who gave up the very throne room of Heaven and exchanged it for a stable filled with the smell of the animals that were kept there. The same Savior that went to Calvary so that the destitute, lost, and pained, might be given salvation, and hope in a life without darkness and grief.

John Reehl asked himself, “Who, more than these ladies, in the forbidden cell, needs to hear God’s good news of great joy?” He asked to be admitted into that cell. It took some time. It took some negotiations. It took some convincing, but permission was given, but only most reluctantly and with great warning.

In the cell, using pictures from a Russian Children’s Bible, John, through his interpreter, told the women of the truths and promises of God, and the forgiveness offered to all who believe. He told them about Adam and Eve, the first sin, the judgment and punishment, and the promise of redemption. John told them all of the stories, and showed how each and every one of them all pointed to Jesus their Savior, and yours. He showed them that there was no sinner beyond the reach of Jesus’ nailed-pierced, loving hands.

The ladies listened with intent and silence. You could have heard a pin drop in that cell as John continued to tell them all that God had promised them. Many of you have heard the Bible stories many times, but for most of these women they were hearing of Jesus love for the first time. It was, for many of them, the first time they had ever heard that God still loved them, and they were not abandoned and alone. Jesus was there for them, and although their circumstances had condemned them to a painful lonely death, they now had a promise of a life without pain was waiting.

A year later, Pastor John Reehl returned to that prison. He returned with the same message he brought before. He saw a woman who looked vaguely familiar. He asked about her and was ordered to keep his distance, she had AIDS and tuberculosis. Then he remembers her, from the forbidden cell. Her hands are bandaged, her face is shrunken, and she looks so much older. He asked her what has happened. She shows him that she has lost all her teeth and through the interpreter she explains that her body is rotting away.

John Reehl continued his work in the prison and was preparing to leave the block. It was then, without warning, that this lady ran up to him and grabbed him. She kissed him in the Russian tradition, on both cheeks. The doctor with John immediately began to scrub his face with alcohol and cotton swabs. While the woman who was being dragged away kept shouting the same sentence over and over in Russian. With the woman gone and the doctor now finished washing John’s

face, John asked his interpreter, “What was she saying?” The interpreter told him, “She was saying, ‘He told me about Jesus! He told me about Jesus!’”

Another year had passed and Pastor John Reehl returned to the prison. That woman was no longer there. The prison had sent her home to die. Alia died a horrible death, her body ravaged by terrible diseases. However, when she took her last breath; when medicine and all the wisdom and knowledge of man could do nothing for her, there was still One who could do something. There was still One, One whom she met in a prison cell, through pictures in a children’s Bible. He took her home, not to die, but to live.

You will meet Alia someday, because though her life was full of sin, and sin’s effect, she was given faith. Faith to believe that though we can do nothing to save ourselves,² God can,³ desires to,⁴ and does save all people from their sins.⁵ When Alia’s body could no longer sustain life, The Life,⁶ Jesus the Holy Christ the Lamb of God took her hand and took her home. The same home that you will one day come to know.

The world will always rail against God. Just this last week the American Humanist Association has begun to release ads that will run through the Christmas season.⁷ These ads blame Christianity for all the troubles in the world, and call on people to see that it is the human heart that saves and helps. On this past Tuesday⁸ the Executive Director of the American Humanist Association stated, “The Bible teaches hate and religious bigotry. It presents values that are the antithesis of American self-reliance, individual liberty, and equality before the law.⁹” His message is “Consider Humanism a better alternative.”

The world will always rail against God. It will spit its venom and shout its hate. It can do nothing else. It won’t be long now and you will see the History Channel, Discovery Channel, and others playing their documentaries that will explain that the Bible is “not quite right.” Then proceed to show what they know “really happened.” They will, one piece at a time, tear every page out of the Bible and replace it with their own. They will do their best to push doubt into your minds. They will try to turn that doubt into unbelief. Then they will try to make you just like them, people who have hardened their heart to the saving faith in Jesus Christ.

2 Ephesians 2:9

3 Matthew 19:26

4 1 Timothy 2:4

5 Matthew 1:21

6 John 14:6

7 <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20101110/new-atheist-ads-go-head-to-head-with-bible-and-quran/>

8 November 9, 2010

9 <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20101110/new-atheist-ads-go-head-to-head-with-bible-and-quran/>

Though they won't use these words, their goal is to cause you to sin against the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ to utterly, and permanently, reject the call to repentance and forgiveness. That is what the world does.

It did the same thing in Jesus time. Listen to Jesus words when some people with similar ideas tried to argue with Him.

How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees!
You hypocrites! You lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. You don't enter it yourselves, and you don't permit others to enter when they try. How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You cross land and sea to recruit a single follower, and when you do, you make that person twice as fit for hell as you are. How horrible it will be for you, you blind guides!¹¹

If they attacked Jesus, you can bet they're going to attack you.¹² What are we to do? Should we rise up, take our Second Amendment rights and take back our land? Should we lock them up and silence them? Should we shut them down? By no means!¹³ We cannot, and do not, force faith on anyone. In fact you cannot. It is impossible. Faith comes solely, and only, through one means. In the Lutheran Church we call those means, "the means of grace." They are God's Word,¹⁴ God's Church,¹⁵ and the Sacraments¹⁶ He instituted to bring forgiveness to the repentant, and salvation to the faithful. Faith is grown by hearing God's Word. Where they have throw God's Word from their hearts and minds, they have also throw out God and God's salvation.

What are we to do when they attack us, berate us, malign us, and cast us aside? We preach Christ crucified,¹⁷ and we pray for them, because the prayers of the faithful have strength. Where they continue to attack we continue to pray because where they may not yield in this world, they will in the next.¹⁸ God will hold them accountable, God will make them pay,¹⁹ God will deal with them.²⁰ We hear try to

10 Luke 12:10

11 Matthew 23:13-16

12 Matthew 5:11-12

13 Romans 13:1-7

14 Romans 10:17

15 Hebrews 10:25

16 Matthew 28:19 - Luke 22:14-23 - Matthew 18:18

17 1 Corinthians 1:23

18 Philippians 2:10-11

19 Matthew 23:33

20 Romans 12:19-21

live in peace with everyone,²¹ knowing that we are powerless to change anyone's heart or mind without God's help.

Our goal is only to bring Christ's message of forgiveness and salvation to everyone.²² To take every opportunity God places before us to share His Word and His promises whenever we can. Because that is all He has asked us to do, and that is all we can do, while we wait. Wait for that Last Day. That Day when we will meet Alia; that day when we will meet all those who have gone before us in the faith; that day when we will meet Jesus; when all this trouble will be gone,²³ and all things will be made new.²⁴

Because that day is coming. God promised it would come. That day which for us is not a day to fear. Judgment Day will be a day of celebration and joy because we, like Alia, and so many many others, will finally be home.

Amen.

21 Hebrews 12:14
22 Mathew 28:18-20
23 Revelation 21:4
24 Revelation 21:1