

## "Turkeys & Tirades"

Malachi 4:1-2a & Luke 21:5-19

November 18, 2007

There's that wonderful story about the little boy who couldn't wait for his new baby sister to come home from the hospital. Couldn't wait to be near her, to talk to her. But his parents didn't want him to be left alone with her; he was only four, they wanted to supervise his visits. He kept begging to be alone with her so one night his parents finally relented. The boy tiptoed into her room and next to his sister's crib and said: "Tell me about God - I'm starting to forget."

It is a delightful image. I don't know about the theology behind it but it is nice to imagine coming so directly from the presence of God. Unfortunately, life too often gets so full of the world that we are drawn away from God. Do you remember God? Sometimes I think that no matter how deeply we have encountered God at some time, we all begin to forget as we get wrapped up in the world. As we approach Thanksgiving, hopefully we will pause for a moment to remember not only the blessings we have received in our lives but to remember the God whom we say has given us those blessings. This God whom we call "Almighty Father, Creator" of all - the giver of all good gifts - will we really remember God? Or will we have forgotten and be caught up in the struggles that present themselves in our lives?

Today we are faced with some very difficult scriptures. They can be depressing to read. They are scriptures that are often connected in some way with an 'end times theology'. Some want to suggest that they only picture some of the horrible things that the world will endure before the return of Christ. In one way they picture what Jesus knew was coming soon in the ancient history of Israel - Jerusalem was totally destroyed just 40 years after His crucifixion. I suspect that we could look at these predictions as things that will be at some future time before the return of Christ. But they are also just a picture of our world. These are things that have always been a part of a world trapped in sin. They are descriptive of our world today.

Jesus talks about the destruction of the temple and the disciples find His prediction to be incredible. It would seem that the Temple mount would have been impossible to destroy. So they ask about the kind of events that they might watch for that will lead up to it's destruction. Jesus mentions things like wars, insurrections, nation rising against nation, earthquakes, famine, plagues, persecutions. The OT prophet, Malachi, adds to that list by

**talking about fires that devastate the landscape - destroying down to the very roots. And it all sounds so very familiar.**

**We have watched lengthy news reports of California wild fires that have devastated huge tracts of land and destroyed hundreds of homes. The ongoing war in Iraq is constantly in the news and now concerns in Iran and Pakistan bring additional nations into closer view. An earthquake the magnitude of 7.7 on the reciter scale was in the news this week - not to mention a typhoid that killed thousands. Perhaps it is not necessary to mention the persecution of the Christian faith that seems to be almost fashionable in our day. Still I find that I can not help but reflect on some of it. This past week I listened to a tirade on national news that came in response to a prayer offered by the governor of Georgia who had the boldness to pray for rain in the midst of the drought they were experiencing. The speaker on the newscast turned out to be the president of the American Atheist's Assoc. - so it makes some sense that it was so adamantly anti-God. She almost shouted that she was sick and tired of people living in this modern age with a stone age mentality - sick and tired of people conjuring the spirits [which I interpreted as her understanding of prayer]. She reiterated several times "There are no spirits - there is no life after death - there is no God!" ..... It is all right here - wars, insurrections, natural disasters and persecution. So, what do we say about all of these things? Do we just say that the end must be upon us? What do we take from this word of God that, at first glance, can be so depressing?**

**Almost hidden in all of those depressing images we hear Jesus say, 'Hang in there.' It's a rough old world but if you can endure 'you will gain your soul' - if you hold on, 'the Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings'. Hold on! Yes - there will be wars and persecutions - there will be natural disasters and very personal traumas but don't let any of these things make you forget God or turn away from Him. Contrary to what we might hear from those who chose not to believe - there is a God - there is a life after death - there is hope! The Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings! Do you remember God?**

**There was a recent Hagar the Horrible comic: Hagar is inciting on his troops. "This is the moment we've been waiting for men! The moment we do battle with the enemy! Is everyone here?" They shout: "YES!" Hagar continues: "Okay men -- repeat after me. 'I am a Viking Warrior!'" "I AM A VIKING WARRIOR!" they shout. "And I will fight to the death for what I believe!" (silence in the next frame) (silence again in a second frame) In the third frame Hagar asks: "Okay, why aren't you repeating after me?!" One meek Viking speaks for them all: "Hagar, the men would like to change that to 'and I will fight hard until it's time for dinner.'"**

**What is it that would make you give up the battle to hold on to faith? Will you fight hard until dinner time? Will you hold fast to the faith until you get overwhelmed by the depressing news of world events gets you down. Will we trust God until it gets personal and our lives are not everything we had hoped they would be?**

I had the opportunity to read a really interesting article this week which discussed why people would choose to become atheists. I have certainly wondered about that. I have wondered if it is because they have just not seen the evidence or had any opportunity to have a good personal encounter with God? I have wondered if it was because they had expected certain things from God that did not come to fruition? What the author said was this: ***"My conclusion is that contrary to popular belief, atheism is not primarily an intellectual revolt, it is a moral revolt. Atheists don't find God invisible so much as objectionable. This is something that we can all identify with. It is a temptation even for believers. We want to be saved as long as we are not saved from our sins. We are quite willing to be saved from a whole host of social evils, from poverty to disease to war. But we want to leave untouched the personal evils, such as selfishness and lechery and pride. We need spiritual healing, but we do not want it. Like a supervisory teenage parent, God gets in our way. This is the perennial appeal of atheism: it gets rid of the stern fellow with the long beard and liberates us for the pleasures of sin and depravity. The atheist seeks to get rid of moral judgment by getting rid of the judge."***

There are so many things that can lead us away from God and faith. It can be a rough old world. But there is a God. And there is a Son of Righteousness. There is healing and hope. As you enjoy the feasts of the week ahead - remember God. Remember God and give thanks for the blessings and the guidance - for the hope and the future!

**AMEN**