

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Old Testament, Year C

KEEP ME POSTED

Malachi 4:1-2a

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28)

Analysis by Bruce K Modahl

1See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. 2But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

DIAGNOSIS: Deserters

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Diagnosis): Deserted Their Post

Malachi was a prophet to the people who returned to Jerusalem after an exile of 50 some years. The city and temple to which they returned were in utter ruin. They set about rebuilding the walls of the city and the temple. Some of these returnees remembered Solomon's temple. When the rebuilt temple was dedicated they wept. These were not tears of joy. The new temple was shoddy compared to Solomon's. The city was but a shadow of the proud city that it once was. Moreover, the priests serving in the temple were corrupt.

In reaction to that the people brought shoddy sacrifices to God. They culled the blind, lame, and sick from the flocks and herds to bring to the Lord's table. They were lax and indifferent to

their worship of God. In the second lesson for this Sunday, Paul uses a word to describe the idlers that in a different context refers to those who deserted their post (2 Thess. 3:6, 7, 11; ἀτακτως).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Deserted Their God

Malachi emphasized over and over the importance of being faithful to the covenant God made with them. Many of the people set that covenant aside as old news no longer applicable to them. One only has to look a few verses back from the assigned text for God's charge against them. They have said, "It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the Lord of Hosts? Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape."

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (External Problem): Reaping Their Just Desserts

They see no profit in keeping God's command. But soon they will see what their desertion will cost them. "See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave neither root nor branch" (v. 1).

PROGNOSIS: Keeping the Faith

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): The One Who Keeps His Post

When reading the prophets, I feel as if they cup my chin in their hands in order to force my vision from the mud at my feet to view the horizon and beyond to see God's promise. The prophet says on God's behalf, "For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings." God's Son

of righteousness, the fruit of Mary's womb, kept to his post. There he hung, forcing our vision upward. He was not ashamed to bear our muddy arrogance and evil and exchange them on our behalf for God's mercy and forgiveness. He rose bodily from the dead and is for us the first born of a new creation. Then he forced our vision even higher as he ascended into heaven as one of us. He promises to come again to usher in the fullness of God's kingly rule.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Adhering to the Promise

The prophet puts a condition on those who will realize God's promise. It is for those who adhere to God's name. We know that we cannot do so on our own. The Holy Spirit calls us to faith by the gospel. By faith we adhere to God's name. Through faith we have a glimpse of God's kingdom come in which all things will be set right.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Alert at Our Post

At our post we have put ourselves in hearing range of the gospel. At our post we do not give to God the blind, lame, and sick from our flocks and herds. Rather, being without flocks or herds, we give bread and wine. We also give the first fruits of our income. We watch those gifts brought up the center aisle and presented to God. Then we get to view something miraculous. God transforms these gifts and gives them back to us. The bread and wine are now the vehicles by which we receive the very body and blood of Christ crucified and raised. Our gifts and our money God multiples and places back into our hands for ministry.