

November 17, 2013
Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Pentecost season file
(Series C)

Malachi 4:1 (OT Lesson)

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

STUBBLE TROUBLE

We are caught between a rock and a hard place.

Most people can tell that something is wrong. They may not want to admit it, but they know the agenda of this world is evil. Things are not what they should be. Even when trying to do the “right thing,” it is a struggle to be good. Teaching our children to be honest, productive, and faithful is never automatic. Sometimes we’re too tired to comfort them. We don’t feel like listening to their concerns because we’re bored, too. Learning to get along with others isn’t restricted to kindergarten; it is a life-long process that many people consider unimportant. Today “it’s every man for himself,” ... “since you only go around once, you better grab all the gusto you can,” ... or “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!” The secular creed is universal. The issues we face because we profess to be Christians in this fallen world are enormous; they chip away at our meager defenses, peer over our pews, and seek to disrupt the peace at all times and in all places. Our faith is always the target. It’s difficult to believe *and* behave. The prophet *Malachi* – the last voice from the Old Testament (435 BC) – would call this malady --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

Look at us.

On the one hand we see the Rock of Ages, the Rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ as he is revealed to us in Word and Sacrament. We study. We pray. We worship in Spirit and in truth because we believe the good news that God for the sake of his only Son forgives us and loves us. We learn to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. We believe what the Bible says because it is the foundation of our faith – the rock solid standard of everything taught and confessed in the Christian community. This provides a certain sense of security. It brings peace. It offers hope. This is why we go to church. We want our lives to matter, to have meaning and purpose. So we build on the Rock.

On the other hand we are taught to trust what we cannot see in the future. Men of faith like Malachi tell us that a day is coming when all the distortions of creation due to sin will be sorted out, once and for all. It will be a dreadful day of judgment such as the world has never seen before. It will be bad for unbelievers, but good for believers. There will be plenty of heat, fire, and burning on a massive, global scale. Our Lord himself said that our redemption is drawing near, but it’s been over 2,000 years since he said that! So, this great day of the Lord is difficult to embrace. It is hard to accept.

We are caught between a rock and a hard place.

There isn’t much comfort out in the field when we have --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

What does this mean?

Stubble is a word that comes from the farm. In the ancient world it was called (Hebrew: *qas*) ... pronounced *k-a-s-h* ... and referred to the worthless stubs that were left in the field after the wheat had been cut and harvested. Here in our text the prophet uses this word as a metaphor to describe arrogant evil doers in the world, annoying unbelievers who make life difficult for people who trust in God. He draws a graphic picture with the Hebrew language about their destiny. It is not a pretty sight. Their day is coming at the end of time

when a destructive, purifying fire will consume them and reduce them to nothing, leaving neither root nor branch, which means no life.

To put it bluntly, ... the stubble will become rubble!

But this isn't a message of fear-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil; it isn't even a warning shot off the port bow for evil doers in the world. This prophecy is aimed at the children of Israel, God's chosen people who are growing weary in the faith and having --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

They knew what the (Hebrew: *kat-tannur*) *oven* in our text was for. They had those fixed or portable bee-hive shaped earthenware stoves in their homes. That's where they baked their bread. But it never dawned on them while they complained about life and baked their daily bread, that the Lord was listening and watching ... or that he would dare to use the stove as a symbol for divine judgment ... like an incinerator on the last, great and terrible day of the Lord! Shocking! And yet decisive! In the end no more --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

This is a message of comfort and encouragement.

- For those who are sick and tired of being harassed and ridiculed for being truthful and honest, loyal and trustworthy, obedient and faithful to a God no one can see.
- For those who are disgusted and fed-up with the way the world is going, who see evil-doers succeed and get ahead, while good, better qualified people are consistently passed over.
- For those who wonder about why worship and faith are important, why the battle against evil seems futile and never-ending, who may have become so immersed in sin the call to repentance has little or no meaning to them anymore.

Listen to "my messenger" ... from the last book of prophecy. Listen to Malachi, which was most likely an abbreviation for the (Hebrew: *Mal'ak-Yah*), which literally meant: *Messenger of Yahweh*. Listen to the words of God before there was silence for almost 400 years broken only by the advent of Christ. Listen and know that we have a God who loves us and forgives us, and will never leave us to fend for ourselves against --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.

There is no need to worry.

God has not left the building.

Christ will return at end of time to judge the living and the dead.

And when he does

There will be no more sin and death.

There will be no more pain and sorrow, no tears of sadness or grief;

Only joy at the final harvest and eternal relief from --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

What's in your faith D-N-A? (deoxyribo-nucleic-acid)

A mixed bag of tricks. Some left-over bad habits. A few white lies and fish stories. Maybe a disguise that looks like *chaff* to blend in at work or school so no one will know *whose* you are, so no one would suspect you've been *baptized*, so no one would ever imagine that you kneel at the *Lord's Table*, so no one would blame you for the death and resurrection of Christ, your Savior. No one would dare think that you have --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

But let's be real.

The *little things* bother us. Those seemingly innocent, little sins stop us and rob us of everlasting life. They irritate us. Frustrate and annoy us. They get in the way. They break our stride, knock us off our pace, and ruin the race for us. But here is the encouraging word for today – in the end they will be gone. God is listening. He is watching over us. He knows about the mischief and mayhem in this world. And it is never his will that anything come between you and him. Not even when ...

- the 800-number for customer service is out-sourced to India
- e-mail floods the computer with spam
- potholes appear out of no where
- the people in front of you let others take cuts in line
- one car takes the last two available parking spaces
- finally reaching the right department you're placed on hold
- you get to church and somebody is sitting in your pew

Malachi is clear. The day is coming when this, too, shall pass.

We may be caught between a rock and hard place,
but we believe *and* behave because we have faith.

May God lead us to repent and turn to him.

May Christ embrace us with his love and assure us that we are forgiven.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us to overcome any danger to our faith, including --

STUBBLE TROUBLE.

In Jesus' Name,

A M E N

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