

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 9, 2018  
TEXT: MALACHI 3:7  
THEME: MAKING A U TURN

Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?'

In the name of Jesus:

If you are like me, you are accustomed to making mistakes. I know the old saying, we all make mistakes, and it is true, we do! Our mistakes many times are private, known only to us. But when we do make a mistake that is known to many, it is good to make a u-turn.

You have made u-turns in your life haven't you? I have. I am in the car, going in one direction, but the direction I am going in is the wrong way, and I will never reach my destination if I don't come to my senses and turn around. When I come to my senses, when I make that u-turn and turn around, then I am headed in the right direction and will end up in the place where I want and need to go.

The Bible says that the will of God is that He wants all people to be saved and come to know the truth. The Good News of Christmas is that God sent His Son into the world to make friends of people who were enemies of God. In our text for today, the prophet Malachi reveals how we can turn to the Lord.

Sadly, the reality is that we are a people who live in the world and act as if God is far away from us. We live as if God is not here. The habits and temptations of the world are near to us. The lack of faith in God is common in our land. Many do not believe in God, rather they believe in gods of their own making. The personal will or the desires of a person has become the god of choice.

When people think of God today, they think of Him being far away and out of touch with not only reality but what is going on in the world and in the lives of people. Malachi says that the presence of God is like an empty vessel that seems far away, God isn't seen in the world and His Word is silenced by many. People of faith in God are mocked as being weak or superstitious. To believe in God and the truths of the Bible is rejected by some today and believers are called narrow minded.

Christians are tempted all the more to live like others live. The Apostle Paul calls us to be in the world and not of the world. However, we are influenced by what we see and hear in the media. As the world dismisses God, we too are tempted to dismiss God in our lives. The world mocks us by asking us the question: "Where is God, where is justice, if God exists, where is He today?" And so our hearts become hardened. We hear Satan whispering in our ears, with thoughts that say: "God doesn't care about you, you are all alone, you need to take matters into your own hands, you need to think for yourself and do for yourself, for after all, if you don't look out for yourself, who will?" Doubt and cynicism begin to creep into our hearts and lives, and we too ask the question, "Is God near, does He know me, and does He care?"

God speaks in His Word, and through His messengers the prophets and evangelists. His Word has always been certain and sure. God was always near to His people and He was near in and through His Word. His messengers of old would speak for God and remind the people that they were going in the wrong direction, and that they would need to listen to Him and make a u-turn, to turn around. But Israel would not listen or pay attention to God and His Word. They continued to do

what they wanted to do, even if it meant that they were living in way and going in a direction away from God. But God didn't destroy them. He continued to speak to His people through the prophets.

God spoke to His people through the prophet Malachi. And He speaks to you and me today through that same prophet. God's Word through Malachi is the same. He is near. He tells us, as He did back in Malachi's time, that we are going the wrong way. God rebukes us for our lack of faith and our cynicism. He warned the people of a time to come, when God would purify the sins of the people with fire. Those who would hear the Word, make a u-turn in their lives, that is, repent and follow the Lord, would live. God's promise is that the people would once again be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old. God would be their God and they would be His people.

God sent another messenger, his name was John. You heard about him in our Gospel lesson for today. John the Baptist came onto the scene as God's messenger, telling people that they needed to make a u-turn in their lives, that they needed to repent. He was like one crying in the wilderness. Was anyone listening? To those who came to him, John called a spade a spade, saying: "you snakes, who told you that you needed to repent? If you are going to repent, you need to turn your life around! You need to show it, bearing fruits in keeping with repentance. Don't just say you are going to turn your life around, do it!" John the Baptist went on to tell those who listened to him that God was coming near to them, and when God would come, He would give those who believe in Him new life. John invited people to be baptized to turn their lives around, and that God would come to forgive the people of all their

sins. When God comes, said John, then Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, <sup>6</sup> and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Did you catch that? All flesh shall see the salvation of God! God wants all people to be saved, and everyone will see God’s salvation. So how in the world will this take place? John the Baptist pointed the way, John the Baptist pointed the people who were coming to listen to him, and he points us today, to the One who has come, His name is Jesus.

John prepared the way of the Lord. He urged people to turn from their cynicism, their pride, their faithlessness, and make a u-turn, that is, turn to Jesus. For Jesus is God’s only Son sent into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save it. Salvation comes through Jesus. Jesus says of Himself that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one can come to the Father, no one can be saved without Jesus. For this is God’s Good News, to you and everyone, that to you is born in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord. The message of Christmas is that not any of us can come up to meet God and reach out to Him, so He came down to us in the Person of Jesus. He was born for you, He lived for you, He stood under the Judgment of God, taking on God’s punishment for sin so that you would know that God loves you. Jesus was born for you, He lived, died and rose again for you, He lives for you today and He loves you. Nothing can ever separate you from the love God has for you because of Jesus.

God is very near you today. God promises to wash away all of your sins in the waters of Baptism. He comes to you today while you are in, in God’s house, to

be present in His Word. Jesus says that where two or three are gathered in His name He is there in the midst of them. Jesus is here with you, with us, that is what Jesus is all about. His name is Imanuel, God with us, God is with us in Jesus, and God is for us in Jesus. And just as God has washed away your sins in Baptism, He Himself makes you into a new person. He recreates and remakes you by the power of Baptism and the power of His Word. The Bible says that if anyone is baptized into Christ that person puts on Christ, that person is a new creation, the old sinful life has been drowned and dies, so that God can remake and rework you into His child, living for Him day after day.

To be sure, to be forgiven doesn't mean that you are now perfect. None of us are. Christians are not perfect, far from it. That is why God sent His Perfect Son, to save us from our sins and imperfections. And even as we go through life, with changes all around us, God's promise is that He is always near. He never left! The Bible says: "I the Lord do not change, Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever!"

So hear God's gracious invitation to you and yours today. Come, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as wool. God loves you, He sent Jesus for you, so keep on turning to Jesus, following Him throughout your life, for He is your ever present Help in times of need. God so loved you that He sent to you His Son, Jesus, so that by believing in Jesus, you have life with God. In His name.

Amen