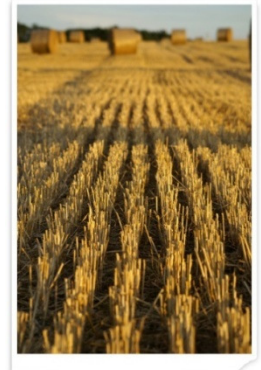


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church-WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Last Judgment/Stewardship of Time & Talents 11.8.2009
Malachi 4:1, 2a



“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Heaven can wait! It always bothers me when I see that in print. Heaven can wait! It’s the name of an article in a Newsweek! Heaven can wait is a book review – a book about absolute proof that there’s life after death. The writer of the article is a man who lost his younger son. Three months after the death of his son – on his birthday – he opens his front door to see a butterfly sitting on his steps – the kind of butterfly he’s never seen before in downtown Brooklyn! Oh, some would say – here’s a little message – a reaching out from the far side! Some people look for the sudden appearance of a little bird, a cloud formation – a special song on the radio. Others are looking for a logical argument from quantum mechanics – from neuroscience, from physics or logic. If you can wait until next year – there’s a book coming out – the result of 600 interviews with people who have been clinically “dead” – *air quotes* – their heart stopping – their breathing stopping – to ask them *if* – while they were clinically dead in the hospital – if perhaps they looked down – and saw a randomly generated symbol – somewhere on the floor – that they could only possibly see from the ceiling – as proof they were conscious looking down from above – apart from their body. This – they say – would be proof of life after death?! How sad is that? We know that there is life after death because the Son of God – the one who said, “**I am the Way, the Truth and the Life**” – died on the cross and rose again on the third day – to save us from our sins. The Risen Lord – the Savior of the World – said, “**Because I live – you also will live!**” Jesus said, “**In my Father’s House are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you! I am going to prepare a place for you – and if I go and prepare a place for you – I will come back and take you to be with me – that you also may be where I am! You know the way to the place I am going!**” Jesus is the Way – the only way to heaven! It is in the light of the Easter Gospel that we believe all of God’s Word. We believe all of God’s promises. This Sunday is one of the very last Sundays of the Church Year. Lutherans pay attention to that – the liturgical Church Year. Today is Last Judgment Sunday. Next week – if this world continues – will be Saints Triumphant. And then will be Christ the King! For three weeks we will talk about end times – Judgment Day – the end of this world – and the beginning of all of us being in Heaven. Then will come 4 Sundays of Advent – the start of a new Church Year. There will be overlap. The 4 Sundays of Advent talk about Jesus’ first coming – as the little baby in Bethlehem. They also point ahead to Jesus’ second coming – as the Judge of all people. This 3rd Stewardship Sunday – *Stewardship of time and our God given abilities* – in the Season of End Times – God’s Word reminds us:

Time is Running Out!

- 1. God’s judgment will be fierce**
- 2. God’s mercy enables us to glorify Him.**

The first lesson for today – is from the scroll of the prophet Malachi. The very first Hebrew word of Malachi’s scroll is translated *an oracle* – the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. The word oracle – literally means a burden – something heavy that weighs on you. Jeremiah understood that – the weight of the message of law and gospel – especially the law – that the LORD had laid upon him. Jeremiah said he had to preach that message of judgment. He wrote, “**But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up on my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot!**” Jeremiah 20:9 The Apostle Paul understood this burden, too. Paul wrote, “**Yet when I**

preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" 1 Corinthians 9:16 Malachi had no choice but to preach a message of judgment to a people with cold hard hearts! That's always the problem—the heart, the mind, the attitude! There was something terribly wrong with the attitude of the priests 400 years before baby Jesus was born. The priests—who literally offered the animals on the altar of the Temple—were offering animals that were blind—animals that were crippled and diseased! It got so bad the LORD said, **"Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!"** When people said, "What a burden!"—they weren't bringing *thank*—offerings—they were bringing *thankless* offerings. And that was wrong. The LORD is not in Heaven—in need of our lambs and sheep. Every lamb on every hill and in every pasture already belongs to him. He has just loaned them to us to feed and water. They all really belong to him—and he can quite literally take them all back at any moment! He really can. It is the prophet Malachi that wrote God's gracious promise—bring abundant thank-offerings—**"Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,"** says the LORD Almighty. **Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,"** says the LORD Almighty. Malachi 3:10b-12

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. Time is short. Recently we have watched a program on the *Food Network* called *Chopped!* It's a contest—four chefs—make an appetizer, a main course and a dessert—beginning with 3 or 4 mystery ingredients in this plastic picnic basket. It's all timed—20 minutes—30 minutes. They count down the clock. When the time is up—you quite literally have to raise your hands and step back. Sometimes what they cooked doesn't get from the stove to the plate. How embarrassing is that? Time is short! Watch a football game—and they have this thing called the two minute warning! They quite literally stop the game to tell you—there are only two minutes—120 seconds left. That's it! Sometimes all your time out-s are used up! You can run out of bounds to stop the clock. You can line up—hike the ball and spike it! You can throw an incomplete pass—and that stops the clock. Sometimes you can't get out of bounds—and the referee waves his arm—the clock keeps running. They have this thing called the hurry up—offense—no huddles—run the play! There is a passion that borders on the frantic—the desperate! By grace alone we have the Gospel—the only way to heaven. The people we love—our family—our friends. How long will we have them? How long is their time of grace? We need to live our lives—seizing the time—before it's too late!

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." Attitude is everything! All that matters is that Jesus died and rose again to wash away all your sins—so Heaven is your forever home! When you remember that—then there is no limit to what you can do or become! Examples abound. A lady named Zoe—(I love that name—Zoe!) Zoe finished the New York Marathon. She's 59 years old. That's two years older than I am. She finished the race—the 26 miles plus three football fields—and then a little more. She finished the New York Marathon—but not before the sun went down—and not before the sun came up again. It took her almost 29 hours. It took her that long—because she is on crutches—because she has Multiple Sclerosis! It took her—on average—more than an hour—to go 12 city blocks. It would be so easy to quit—to give up—to give in—to stop and say, "I tried. I just can't!" But she kept on going. In part—she will tell you—because of the hand full of people who walked with her—encouraging her—again and again! We need to encourage the people around us—on the way—on the path to heaven. We might be marathoners—our race lasting 80 or 90 or 100 years. And it might be we are sprinters—our race exceedingly short!

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." To revere the name of the LORD is to show respect for his saving reputation. You do that by being careful what you say and how you act. One of the best parts of going to a sporting event is the Wisconsin tradition of tailgating! You open up the back of your SUV and get out your grill—and start the fire for grilling brats or burgers or whatever! Some people come to games—and don't even have tickets—they just cook out—and visit with people at the game! The bad part of tailgating—is people who have had too much to drink. The same with watching the game—with people around you who have had too much to drink. They say things that are gross

and disgusting. They spill beer on the people around them. They get in fights – and get thrown into a jail cell by the police! This shows no respect for our Heavenly Father! When we use God’s gift of time – to show respect for our Savior – for our family and for our neighbor – then it’s like the sun coming up – with that indescribable warmth. Jesus is the Son of righteousness. He heals hearts and minds and souls! **“The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”** Healing of the heart and soul come from Jesus’ forgiveness – that makes us strong to forgive! It is on the news again and again – people guilty of unspeakable crimes – doing even fatal harm to small children. Do you think about that? Do you think about the people you love – and what you would do – if somebody hurt them – a drunk driver ran over them – or a drug addict robbed them or molested them. What would you do? Again this week – a relative of a victim – jumped up in court – and grabbed the criminal who hurt their loved one – and began to pound them! Isn’t there a part of you that says, “Good! They deserve that and worse!” If you were the police – would you be in a hurry to rescue the wicked evil most horrible criminal from the survivors of their unspeakable evil? It is only the Son of God – with his grace and power that could heal our hearts – so that we could forgive others – no matter how hurtful their sins against us. Only Jesus’ forgiving love – can enable families to mend – when there has been drunkenness and unfaithfulness – words and actions that have cause horrible heartache! It is only Jesus’ forgiving love, then, that can make us strong enough – to use the time God has given us – to help and to forgive! Use God’s gift of time – to share the Gospel. Use God’s gift of time – to teach Sunday School – to be a part of the live nativity – to tell people in our community that Christ the Savior is born – to take away all your guilt! Come to voters meetings. Encourage your children and grandchildren to grow up to be called workers. Pick up sticks in the lawn and parking lot – tend Jesus’ flower beds. See something that needs to be fixed or improved – and make it better!

Time is short. Do you know that? Do you really believe that – or not? Chances are – you have heard about a professor – a teacher at Carnige Mellon University in Pittsburg, PA – a teacher named Dr. Randy Pausch. Dr. Pausch found out – that he had Pancreatic Cancer – that he only had a short time to live. And so he spent a great amount of time – preparing for what would most likely be his final lecture. He began with a picture of the MRI that showed the five tumors growing in his pancreas. Then he did some push-ups to show that for now he still had pretty much physical strength. He talked about trying to fulfill his childhood dreams and ambitions. He talked about how sad he was – not being able to see his children grow up. When you boiled it all down – his three main points were this. **“Have fun! Never give up! Always look for the good in others.”** By the grace of God – what would you say? Would you say – have fun? Never give up! Always look for the good in others? Or would you say we are all wretched sinners – deserving of eternal torment in a real place called hell? Would you say that Jesus lived a life without sin – then died on the cross – to pay for the sins of the whole wide world? Would you say that Jesus loves you and has forgiven you – so that whenever you die – you know you will go to heaven for sure? Would you say – my time might be so exceedingly short? So I will want to use what time I have – and what abilities I have – to glorify Jesus – to share his love – with everyone I meet? Jesus’ forgiving love is all that matters. Be faithful managers of what time and abilities Jesus has given you – to share that love. Amen!

To God alone all glory!



Rev. Anthony E. Schmitt