Text: Malachi 3:1-7b

**Introduction**

The keyword that is tying together all these mid-week homilies is “Behold”. We mentioned last week that the particles of speech that get translated “behold” appeared roughly 1100 times in the Bible. And it functions something like God saying “wake up” or if you’ve been skimming along, slow down and read this closely. This is an important part.

What came after the “Behold” last week was THE PROMISE. The Days are Coming. The LORD is our righteousness. It was the pure promise both that God had not forgotten and that God himself would fulfill his promises.

**Text**

The “Behold” this evening is a little more specific. How shall the promise be fulfilled? What can we expect?

As is often the case with prophetic vision, looking at future fulfillments is a bit like looking at mountains in the distance. You can’t really tell how far away the furthest back are. And you can’t see the valleys in between the peaks. I think Malachi captures three peaks.

First, “behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” This is the first advent. John the Baptist came as that messenger and Christ comes right behind him. The LORD came to his temple. And we might be tempted to think of that temple as being the place in Jerusalem, but Jesus was never really that impressed with the temple of stones. It impressed everyone else, but Jesus would cleanse it complaining that “the house of prayer had become a marketplace.” The disciples tried to get him to look at the fine stones, and all Jesus would say is that they would all come down. Jesus in that stone temple spent his time looking at the people. The Pharisee and the tax collector who came to pray. The widow who brought her mite and all the great and the good who brough chests. Jesus was always looking at the living stones.

We tell conversion stories. And most of those conversion stories are about suddenly seeing. The LORD suddenly coming to his temple. But most of those sudden conversion stories had a messenger. Monica, St. Augustine’s mother, might be the old example of this. The modern version of this might be Tolkien to C.S. Lewis. Of course Tolkien was a little grumpy – a bit like the Baptist we will see this coming Sunday – when the converted Lewis didn’t become a Roman Catholic. But this is just to say that most conversions have their messengers, before the LORD comes to his temple. The convert controls the story, the messenger should remember John’s phrase – “he must increase and I must decrease.” When Christ has come to his temple, the call has been fulfilled.

The second peak is the question of any visitation of the LORD. “Who can endure the day of his coming, who can stand when he appears?” And Malachi’s answer is that Christ will “purify the sons of Levi…and they will bring offerings in righteousness.” Who are the sons of Levi? Levi was the priestly tribe. And very specifically they were not the Aaronic priesthood who were the permanent servants of the tabernacle/temple, but they were the priestly tribe that was scattered throughout the other tribes.

At the Advent of Jesus, he sent them out two by two. First the 12, then the 72. And this continues today. Christ sends his messengers out to prepare the way, to refine – to sanctify – his people. The calling of pastors is to proclaim the coming of Jesus. He comes to us in his Word. He comes to us in the sacraments under water, bread and wine. And it is the word and sacraments that make us pleasing offerings.

And that leads to the third peak that Malachi sees. “Then I will draw near to you for judgement.” That 2nd advent is always the backdrop of any Christian preaching. The Day of the LORD is a day of division. The Day of the Lord is a day of revelation. Who can stand when he appears? There are those who have seen the unchanging love of God for his people in Jesus and have heard the messengers sent; and there are those who do not fear that day. And of all things this should be clear. We all have our own personal small d day of the Lord. In the day of our trouble, who do we call upon?

**Conclusion**

“Behold, I send my messenger.” The Augsburg Confession puts it this way. After Article 4, which has been called the article the church stands upon, the great Reformation article of Justification – “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake through faith.” After article 4 is article 5 on the ministry. “So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted.” Having Christ, article 4, the heart faith, is the important stuff. And so that you might have Christ, a messenger is sent to prepare the way. Christ is coming…the messenger gives time to prepare. Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the message is simple. Repent, and bear the fruits of repentance, for the Kingdom is here.