**Morning Praise @ Home 5th December 2021**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

### Bible Readings Malachi 3:1 – 4 Luke 3:1 – 6

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**Reflection by John**

Someone once said that if you take the text out of its context, you are left with a con.

So, what is the context of our reading from the book of Malachi.

The book of Malachi is one of the Old Testament books known as the minor prophets.

He lived around the same time as prophets such as Ezra and Nehemiah and he was sent from God to encourage the Children of God, the Jews, to turn back to God and to mend their ways.

The Jews of Malachi’s life time were very similar to people living in Britain today.

In Malachi’s day, Jewish society had turned their back on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and had gone and worshipped other gods.

And that is very similar to what is going on in the UK today.

Many still call themselves Christians but do not live the life Christ wants. Their gods can be the making of money or idolising football or pop stars.

I would like to look at one verse, from Malachi chapter 3, and it’s this:

“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness”

I think it is very relevant today to us as Christians.

But let me explain what I mean by a story I came across:

Some time ago, a few ladies met in a certain city to study the scriptures.

While reading the third chapter of Malachi, they came upon a remarkable expression in the third verse:

"And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver"

One lady proposed to visit a silversmith, and to report to them on what he said about the subject.

She went accordingly, and without telling the object of her errand, begged the silversmith to tell her about the process of refining silver.

After he had fully described it to her, she asked, "But Sir, do you sit while the work of refining is going on?"

"Oh, yes madam," replied the silversmith; "I must sit with my eyes steadily fixed on the furnace, for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured."

The lady at once saw the beauty, and comfort too, of the expression, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

God puts us, His children into a furnace to purify us.

His eye is steadily intent on the work of purifying, and His wisdom and love are both engaged in the best manner for us.

Our trials do not come at random, and He will not let us be tested beyond what we can endure.

Before she left, the lady asked one final question, "When do you know the process is complete?"

"Why, that is quite simple," replied the silversmith. "When I can see my own image in the silver, the refining process is finished."

And that for me is the ***key*** to the understanding of Malachi 3:3:

“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness”

The process of becoming a Christian is called the process of salvation. Christ has done it all.

But once we are Christians God will want us to change to become more like Christ, a process we call sanctification.

Ephesians 2:8-10 sums up these two processes:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”

That is the process of salvation, but Paul goes on to say:

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

That’s the process of sanctification.

So, with this in mind, let us look at Malachi 3:3 again:

“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness”

Jesus wants our lives to be purified from the dross that stops us being a pure human being.

God wants us to become more and more like Jesus was and indeed still is.

And so, he will touch those areas of our lives that need reforming.

And it is up to us how we will respond.

And as you give up those things that displease God, they will become your offering in righteousness.

May I leave you with a story about the late Richard Wurmbrand (who is a great Christian hero of mine).

He records this story in his book “*In God’s Underground*”.

Richard Wurmbrand was a Lutheran minister in Romania during the Communist rule and he was put in prison for his faith by the Communist authorities, two and a half years of which were in solitary confinement.

One day a young keen Communist man was thrown into his cell because the young man had said something with which the State disagreed.

When Wurmbrand introduced himself as a pastor, the young man told him that he wanted nothing to do with Christianity, citing Marx’s comment that "religion is the opiate of the people."

So Wurmbrand didn't try to evangelise him.

As rations were very meagre in prison, Wurmbrand used to share his bread with the young man.

Slowly over time they became friends and one day the young man said: “Tell me who is Jesus like”.

Wurmbrand replied quietly: “Jesus is like me”.

To which the young man replied, “Then I would like to get to know him”.

I often think of that story because ***I would never dare to say that Christ is like me.***

And if I did I very much doubt anyone would want to know Christ when they look at me.

But I do pray that the longer I am a Christian the closer I will become to being Christlike. As Jesus prayed “Thy will not mine be done”.

How about you?

Does your life reflect Christ or are you still a work in progress?

And how would people react if you said that “Jesus is like me?”. **Amen**

 **Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ

known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession led by John**

Almighty God, open our eyes, that we might see you. Open our ears, that we may hear you. Open our mouths, that we might speak your praise.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

Mighty God, give us faith like John the Baptist, strong enough to believe even in a desert that you and your kingdom are no farther from us than our hands. Make our heart strong like his, not swayed by trials or snared by false pleasures. Give us courage to be faithful until your promises are fulfilled.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

We pray that as we pursue the many imaginative ways in which our Churches approach Christmas during Advent, help us to understand through them the different truths about God’s amazing love and grace.

Guide the hearts of those seeking to find our new vicar. May they hear and listen to your voice.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

We pray for those whose responsibility it is to manage the world’s economy, and for those who have difficult ethical decisions to make; we pray for wisdom and courage to do what is right especially in the light of new mutations of the Covid Virus.

We pray for all who are terrorised throughout the world especially where fragile economies and international friendship and understanding are threatened as tourists no longer visit places affected by recent terrorist attacks.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

Lord, we pray for those we see and talk to every day or every week; for those we often argue with or misunderstand; for those who brighten our lives and make us smile; for a greater thankfulness and appreciation of those we usually take for granted.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

Loving God, all the needs of your children are already known to you and so with God-given love we bring to mind those who are suffering physically, spiritually or emotionally, that they may find you there beside them in these dark and painful times.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

We pray for the dying and those who have passed from this earthly life.

May they know the eternal peace of heaven, and may those who miss them be comforted.

Lord in your mercy. **Hear our prayer**.

Merciful God, who sent John the Baptist to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation; Give us grace to take heed of his warnings and to turn away from our sinfulness so that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,

that you may live and work to his praise and glory,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**