

Sermon for 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
November 16, 2025
Proper 28C
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Trinity on the Hill Episcopal Church
Los Alamos, New Mexico

Malachi 4:1-2a
Psalm 98
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
Luke 21:5-19

This past week rereading through today's lessons,
I've been thinking a lot about Time.
Getting older has brought Time to the forefront for me.
Days that as a child once seemed to take forever to pass, now fly by,
and I lift my hands as to say, "Where has the time gone."
Or as my father would put it: "We're burning daylight."

I'm sure part of my recent fascination with time
is due to watching *Interstellar* again for the third or fourth time.

Of course, *Interstellar* is more about relativity and gravity's effects on time.
One of the defining episodes in the film demonstrating relativity
shows part of the crew spending two hours on a planet
near the event horizon of a black hole.
When they return to their ship at a more distant orbit
they discover nearly twenty-seven years have passed.
Oh, the realities of temporal mechanics.

A prose description of Time goes like this:
"the continuous progression of existence that occurs
in an apparently irreversible succession from the past, through the present,
and into the future. Time dictates all forms of action, age, and causality,
being a component quantity of various measurements used to sequence events, to compare the duration of
events (or the intervals between them),
and to quantify rates of change of quantities in material reality
or in the conscious experience.
Time is often referred to as a fourth dimension,
along with three spatial dimensions.¹

In many ways, all of the lessons today are about time.

I was raised in a church in which the end of days
were the focus of most of the preaching.
Repent! The end is near! Jesus is coming!
That's what Malachi is saying.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time>

Like most of the books of the Old Testament,
we don't know who wrote the book of Malachi, or when it was written.
Most scholars believe the book was written around the time
of Israel's return from captivity in Babylon, after the Temple was restored,
and the leaders have returned to their old tricks:
Not taking care of those who need taking care of.
Malachi is reassuring the righteous that there will be a reckoning.

The Psalm, as well, foresees the time of the LORD's coming:
"Let the rivers clap their hands,
and let the hills ring out with joy before the LORD,
when he comes to judge the earth."

Paul addresses the present time for the church in Thessalonica.
They are convinced the day of the LORD is at hand so why work.
Paul admonishes the community to remember that the coming end
is not an excuse to stop contributing to the fellowship.
What Paul wants people to realize, as Yogi Berra said:
"It ain't over till it's over."

Thessalonians was the first letter written by Paul around 50 A.D.,
when people were convinced that Christ was coming back next week.

Paul's message was to keep working up to the end:
God don't want no shirkers.

The interesting thing about Malachi:
it's the last book of the Christian Old Testament.

Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah
before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.
He will turn the hearts of parents to their children
and the hearts of children to their parents,
so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

Those are the last two sentences of the Old Testament.
In the Christian tradition, Elijah comes
in the form of John the Baptist to gather the righteous
and proclaim the coming of Jesus – the Messiah.

Which is why today's reading from the Gospel of Luke ends
as Jesus tells the pain that will befall his followers
while assuring them that they will not perish.

The time is coming, Jesus tells his disciples:
"the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another;
all will be thrown down."
The Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D.
when the Romans burned Jerusalem and pulled the walls down.

When the disciples asked for a sign, Jesus could have said, when you see Romans running around with torches. What Jesus tells them, however, to wait, and be wary. No one will know when the end is coming.

We also all have to wait. For what, you may ask. To wait for the end?

No. We are cautioned to wake up and realize
in two weeks we will embrace Advent.

Advent, when we prepare not only for the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, but for the coming of the Son of Man in clouds of Glory.

We are to prepare ourselves as temples to receive the risen Lord.

It's the destruction of the temple, though, which seems to be the focus
of both the Old Testament and Gospel readings.

All the time in Babylon, the people yearned
for their return to Jerusalem and the Temple.

And when, in time, the Temple is restored,
the Temple itself becomes more important than the wellbeing of the people
who the priests of the Temple are to serve.

God was identified with the Temple rather than the people.

That's the genius of the prophecy of Jesus that the Temple will be destroyed. The whole of Jesus' ministry
was based on the importance of people
and their relationship with God.

That's what Jesus proclaims to his disciples
that they are to witness to those in power
the importance of their relationship with God
and God's relationship with people.

That's the problem with the Thessalonians.

Those who hang on to the expectation of the end times
forget their responsibility to their community and to each other.

The community needs all its people participating.

That's why Paul reiterates: Anyone not willing to work, doesn't eat.

Unfortunately, this verse has been used to argue against assistance of any kind. The reality is more
complex than slogans and bumper stickers.

The readings today caution us to examine our lives
to find what it is that we hang on to that isn't God's.

As is the caution in 12-step groups:

take your own inventory before you start taking the inventory of others.

The Collect today prays that we realize what it is we've been given:

"Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear
them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed
hope of everlasting life..."

We're told in the Scriptures that that there are two great commandments: Love the Lord your God with all
your heart and mind and strength,
and Love your neighbor as yourself."

It's time for us to learn to see God in other people.
We express our love for God by loving other people and caring for them.

That's what this life is about;
that's what we are to hang on to with all our might.
It's time.