**Malachi 4:1-16 November 17, 2019**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Old Testament lesson, Malachi chapter 4 here re-reading these words, “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming that shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I don’t have to tell you that we are reaching the end of the year. Especially after last week, where we were thrown into blowing snow, icy roads, and cold wind. While this weather may be more expected around December or January, we are facing it here in the middle of November, and it’s rare that what we expect at the end of the calendar year is matching up with the end of the Church Year. This is the second to last Sunday of the Church Year, a time of reflection upon the end of all things. Our Gospel lesson speaks of the signs of Judgment Day, “signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world.” What a definition of the world that we live in today, and how true it is. The Day is surely drawing near.

In a world of perplexity, we seek a true and lasting comfort, just like we do when the cold winds blow. I don’t know what temperature you keep your house at, but I’m guessing whatever it’s set to it isn’t done by accident. There is the stereotype of Fathers always keeping tabs on the thermostat in the house, but I think we all have an idea of what the temperature is. We seek that perfect comfortable temperature, where we are warm, but not too hot and not too cold. I’ve walked into houses before where I was freezing and kept my coat on because their usual temperature was so low, and I’ve also walked into houses where someone is sitting next to a heater, and the temperature is somewhere around 80, only to find them under a blanket and wearing a sweater. The point is our comfort level in regard to heat can vary, but we never want to be burning.

Like when someone uses another water source while you are in the shower and suddenly you are freezing or scorched. Like when you accidentally touch a hot surface on a stove and feel the white-hot pain and see the lasting mark. We use fire for heat in order to be comfortable. But that comfort isn’t what’s described on Judgment Day for those who are evildoers and arrogant. Instead of finding the comfort of a manageable heat we find blazing and burning on a day that is drawing near. Those who are arrogant enough to think of themselves as greater than God don’t find comfort and protection, but instead only the fire of judgment. The fire that reduces them to stubble! Stubble meaning an ash, a burned and useless remnant of something that once was there, like a corn stalk that has been pulverized and pushed down by a combine. Like the ash that remains after burning a fire. “They will be stubble.” Says the Lord. A useless remain that has been burned and destroyed.

In our Epistle lesson we find those who are guilty of seeking too much comfort. Those who are arrogant enough to think that they don’t need to work and aren’t following the example of Paul and his followers. “For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.” It really could be summed up in a simple question, “who do you think you are?” Everyone else has to work for their food and you don’t? It’s that idea of sloth, laziness, and being idle that connects us to the arrogance of our Old Testament lesson, and the ultimate judgment of all sin. Evil is usually understood through the first use of the Law, which acts as a curb to our lives and how we behave in society. The true evildoers are those who go over that curb and do things that even the most unreligious of person would find detestable. Murder, adultery, stealing, cheating, finding delight in hurting other people, that is evil. But wasting time at work? Taking an extra sick day? Manipulating the system to get something for free because of a technicality? Sure, those actions are unethical, they may even show our arrogance in thinking we can get away with it, but it doesn’t make us evil does it? And that’s usually where we have placed the bar of salvation and ultimately, it’s who we see headed for the “burning oven of destruction” as we hear about here in Malachi chapter 4, on Judgment Day. The evildoers get destroyed, the really really bad ones, the arrogant too….sure….to some extent…..the idle? The lazy? The one who aren’t really hurting anyone else but themselves? Well…maybe not…

Because that’s where we see ourselves, and we don’t like the idea of becoming stubble, who would? We want vengeance and wrath upon our enemies, upon the evildoers of the world, upon the super villains that we find on the news who have committed unspeakable acts. But we don’t like to think of the judgment that will come for all those who dwell in their sins, whether they be of laziness, whether they be of sinful addiction and pet sins of lying, gossip, stealing from our boss, being disrespectful to those in authority over us, or just plain being idle. Not wanting to serve, not wanting to help, not wanting to give or participate, believing that God is happy with us just doing our own thing and whatever we want to do. Is that not the definition of arrogance? That God would just want your happiness, that the Almighty God of the universe, the omnipotent Creator, the all-knowing, and all present Divine God, three persons, one essence, would defer to you on how you should live your life? That he would just accept that what you’ve decided to do is a better path than the one he has called you to in his Word? That’s a false sense of comfort, that’s not the warmth of the sun of righteousness, that’s the heat of the upcoming burning of the oven. We must repent. See our own arrogance and idleness and see our own evil tendencies. Repent and see the Day is drawing near and we will be judged for what we’ve done wrong.

Because the heat of the oven is terrifying, but the heat of the sun is comforting. “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.” There are so many names for Jesus, and the one that speaks to His relationship with the Father is Son – S-O-N. But it’s also true to describe Jesus as the S-U-N sun in that it in Jesus Christ that we find our life, our comfort, and the light which dispels the darkness and shows us the way. Without the sun, S-U-N, the literal sun there is no life on this earth, no light means no life. Without the sun there is no heat, no warmth, we freeze and die, without the sun there is no clarity, there is just eternal night, but with Jesus Christ the S-O-N and S-U-N there is everlasting life, because the day of Judgment is a day of rejoicing in His return to take us home. It is a day of celebration because of the righteousness that is bestowed upon us and that we receive by the death and resurrection of God’s own S-O-N son, meaning that we are made right with God our heavenly Father because our sin, the separating factor between us and Him is gone, forgiven, taken away, paid for by the blood of the lamb. And now we have the comfort of being in God’s presence, the comfort, the perfect temperature so to speak, in our lives, of knowing that no matter what happens to us, we will be with the Lord.

In our Gospel lesson there is a list of uncomfortable realities that are signs of the end times, of persecution, of wars and destruction, of being dragged before those in authority and having to give an answer, give a report, or even just bear witness to your faith, but even in those signs we have the comfort of knowing that we are in the glow and heat of the S-U-N of righteousness and no matter what happens to us on this earth we are saved. We are headed for the promised land of eternal peace with God our Father. And our way is clear, not to sit idly by or phone it in here at the end of the year. But to go forward, seeing clearly in the light of the S-U-N of righteousness, which is the same S-O-N of God, who has called us out of darkness, into his light, to serve him. To do Good Works, to give of our time, to not give in to arrogance and idleness and evil. To serve, to share, to pray, to learn, and grow. To work. Yes, to work with joy and purpose and thanksgiving for the work that God has called us to do.

The year is ending, yes I’m sure you’ve seen all the Christmas Ads and maybe even heard a Christmas song or two. But next week the Church Year ends, and that doesn’t mean things are cooling down, instead they are heating up. We are heading for a season of preparation, here at the end of our Old Testament lesson in verse 5 ,”Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.” The one who came as Elijah and some even thought was Elijah brought back to prepare the royal highway, and prepare the way of the Lord with a message of repentance. We’ll hear about John the Baptist, we’ll hear about an angel who visits a virgin betrothed to marry a carpenter in Nazareth. We will hear about the fulfillment of the prophecy of a Savior. Now isn’t the time to sit in idleness, in your life as a Christian, now is the time that we draw near and are prepared for the coming of Jesus, not just in the remembrance of his first coming as a baby in Bethlehem, but when he comes again. When the sun of righteousness rises and the night of sin is dispelled. When we are healed and brought to the comfort and peace of His presence.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.