

Cleaning the silver: Malachi 3.11-4.1

Today's TFTD comes from RD Hill.

Don't forget to go to our church website to experience the Advent Calendar online! You'll find a story, a song and a craft activity linked to today's TFTD. Just click on the link below:

<https://www.stphilipandstjames.co.uk/advent>



When I was a teenager a tub of Brasso featured heavily in our house. It was Boys' Brigade night, so every Monday evening first my younger brother and then me, would polish our belt buckles and the brasses on the haversack that were a part of our uniform, in order that we would go on parade looking as smart as we could. However, we made an awful mess with the brasso and so eventually my mum moved us onto Duraglit – it's a bit more controllable for clumsy teenage boys! Later, when I became an officer, the Brasso was replaced by Silvo and by then I could manage to control it sufficiently not to make a mess as I polished my silver cap badge. It's not quite refining, but it is certainly about making the metal look better! Likewise, the cleaning of the candlestick is about making it look better, in order that the light from the candles will be more impressive, more visible. Hold on

to that thought, it will come back to it shortly.

The book of Malachi is, of course, the last in the Old Testament and that is, perhaps, the reason why many of us know of its existence but far fewer of us have read. Those who are familiar with Handel's magnificent oratorio 'Messiah' will be familiar with some of the words from the early part of Malachi Chapter 3. You'll find it on YouTube here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALgzP6-M7_Y

If you were able to look at that clip you will have seen the kind of images that are often linked with the passage, images about the birth of Jesus that first Christmas, the Incarnation, but you will have seen that it is also linked with images of thunder, fire and the second coming of Christ, with all that we have come to associate with that. Most of the commentators that I have looked at reckon that both may legitimately be seen in the passage, but I want to suggest that, like most of the written prophecies that we have there is not only an element of foretelling the future (that is, telling the people that if they carry on in this way the consequences will be dire) but also speaking into the political situation of the time.

Malachi is almost certainly written in the period after the exiled Hebrew people have returned to Jerusalem. The City and the Temple have been rebuilt, but it was not like it used to be. (Where have I heard that before?) It's in that context that the prophet in the earlier part of the chapter speaks about the one who is to come being like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.

Although the message of Malachi is about the Hebrew people and their faithfulness to God's call, or lack of it, there is a recognition that this is not just a spiritual matter, there are political, social ethical etc. consequences to their (and our) disobedience. In particular, there are ecological consequences for this disobedience ("return to me and I will return to you" says the Lord almighty, ...[and] I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vine your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe" Mal 3.7b & 11)

The Brasso was for me a constant reminder that the brass was tarnished and needed cleaning and perhaps it's a reminder that the world is tarnished and needs repentance and a turning back to God, perhaps especially in our plundering of the natural resources of the world.

The climate emergency challenges us all to repentance of the way in which we are plundering the natural world and must change, but for me there's a much deeper and

theological reasons why we need to change and it's this – the earth is the Lord's and we are merely stewards of it, called to be the best stewards that we can. Today's song reminds us that the message of advent is that there is hope

“Angels, announce to man and beast
Him who cometh from the East.
Set every peak and valley humming
With the news, the Lord is coming:
People look East and sing today,
Love, the Lord, is on the way.”

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