



## **23rd SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

**NOVEMBER 16, 2023**

**St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR**

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

**THE SERMON: “In Love and Mercy  
Guide Us...”**

**Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

I don't know about you, but I've been upset about the news of the president demolishing the East Wing of the White House to build a huge ballroom. I felt the same way when the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan in 2001. It saddens me when we humans have such low regard for history and culture. Of course that reminded me of this joke I told a while ago about a female journalist who heard about a very old Jewish man who had been going to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem to pray, twice a day, everyday, for a long, long time. So she went to check it out. She went to the Wailing Wall and there he was! She watched him pray and after about 45 minutes, when he turned to leave, she approached him for an interview. “Sir, how long have you been coming to the Wall to pray?” He answered, “For about 60 years.” She exclaimed, “60 years! That's amazing! What do you pray for?” “I pray for peace. I pray for all the hatred to stop and I pray for all our children to grow up in safety and friendship.” “How do you feel after doing this for 60 years?” He answered sadly, “Like I'm talking to a wall!” Doesn't it feel like that sometimes when we're praying? Why is God so silent? Why doesn't God answer us? But, maybe we need to remember what prayer is about. Prayer isn't about changing God or changing God's will. Prayer is really about God changing us.

### **Malachi 4:1-2**

As we approach the end of the church year, it is fitting that our lesson is from the final book of the Old Testament. Malachi chronicles the

dialogue between the LORD and the people—a dialogue recalling both their faithfulness and their faithlessness. In this final chapter, the LORD declares a coming day of judgment for the arrogant and evildoers: “See, the day is coming... when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.” But for the faithful, the promise is radically different: “for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.” And the feeling that accompanies this love? Malachi draws this image: “You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.” When was the last time you felt God’s presence so strongly that you **leaped and danced and praised God**? It reminds us of the story in Acts when a man crippled from birth asked Peter and John for alms. Peter answered, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” The man was instantly healed and, as Luke tells us, he went “walking, leaping, and praising God.” That is the joy Malachi describes. When our prayers change us, and our will becomes God’s will, then we will know what real joy is.

### **Luke 21:5-19:** Endurance Through Crisis

This message of joy seems at odds with Jesus’ words in our Gospel lesson. The disciples were admiring the beautiful Temple when Jesus said, **“As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”** Luke likely recorded this 50 years after Jesus’ death, at a time when the church knew that the Romans had already destroyed the Temple. So, Jesus’ warnings had profound significance for them: “When you hear of wars and insurrections, do not be terrified... But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you... You will be hated by all because of my name...” This was not a message of terror, but a promise of perseverance. Jesus concludes: **“By your endurance you will gain your souls.”** The physical Temple was destroyed, but Jesus’ followers understood that the true Temple was not made of stone. As Paul told the Corinthian church, a believer’s body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within them. As long as people believed, **God’s Temple—the church—endured.**

### **2 Thessalonians 3:6-13**

Our epistle lesson shows that Jesus’ prediction did come true in the church in Thessalonika. They did endure persecution and discrimination,

but more deadly was division within the church itself. There were false prophets who declared that the day of the Lord had come so they convinced others to quit working and live off other church members. That's what Paul is addressing in today's lesson, "we command you... to keep away from every brother or sister living irresponsibly... For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us... so that we might not burden any of you... we gave you this command: anyone unwilling to work should not eat." Paul is saying what St. Augustine taught, if we knew the world was ending today, we should keep on working. So, Paul commands those living irresponsibly, "... we command and exhort (them) to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." Jesus told us that no one knows the day or the hour when the end will come. Maybe some believed that the end had come when the Temple fell. History tells us that people thought the world had ended plenty of times. Luther may have thought the end had come when he was excommunicated from the church. Some thought the World Wars were the end. In our day David Koresh, Harold Camping, and even Pat Robertson predicted the end of the world, but here we are. We don't know the day or the hour. But, Christians should know that God will be there. And, the God I know is not an angry god of retribution and violence. The God Jesus showed me is a God of Mercy and Love.

### **Psalm 98, The Call and the Challenge**

It seems that our psalm this morning was written by a psalmist who knew the loving merciful God that Jesus knew, because the psalmist proclaims, "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things... He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel... Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre... With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar and all that fills it... Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy..." Scholars speculate that this psalm was written for the rededication of the Temple after the Jewish Maccabees drove out the Seleucid Greeks and liberated Palestine. And, you and I know the feeling! It's the feeling that Dodger fans had when they came back from behind to win the World Series earlier this month. It's the feeling I had when Marilyn said she'd marry me. Imagine how

happy the Jews must have felt when they could go back into the Temple and worship God and not have to be humiliated by a cruel despotic madman who claimed he was their god and king, who sacrificed pigs on the sacred altar. Imagine their joy when they sang, "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory... He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God." I don't know if we sensed their joy and happiness when we read, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord... Sing praises to the Lord... with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn..." But, the psalmist hears more than the celebration of the congregation, he hears creation rejoicing, "Let the sea roar and... Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy..." And, unlike some Christians who make us think the Day of the Lord will be dark and forboding, the psalmist welcomes it, "(Make a joyful noise) at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity." Christians shouldn't be afraid of God's judgment! Even though we learned a few weeks ago that "All have sinned and fall short of God's glory" and we are all sinners and deserve to go to Hell, God has saved us from any of that. We are able to come into God's holy presence even though we don't deserve it, because of what God did on the cross on which our Savior died. That's what this psalm is telling us. God loves you! Make a joyful noise! Sing praises to the Lord with lyre and trumpet! Let the sea roar and let the hills sing for joy. God judges the world with righteousness and equity. Now, as we stand and sing, let us truly pray the words of the hymn that our God of every nation will redeem all of creation so that hate and fear will not divide us and bitter threats will be silenced. And, may God truly heal our strife-torn world. (ELW 713: O God of Every Nation)