



Ord Sunday 32

THE NEW SHOFAR

Is it not time we stopped blaming God?

God is not God of the dead but God of the living

Great is Yahweh - even beyond the borders of Israel (1:5)

The prophesy of Malachi is short but packed with spiritual reassurances. This closing book of the Old Testament was compiled during the period after the return of Israel from exile in Babylon. It was thus addressed to a people struggling with famine, diseases, widespread destruction, warlike skirmishes from neighbouring peoples and a land with no Temple and no way of being reassured of the presence of God among them. “If Yahweh truly was God, how could he let all of these terrible things happen to his own people?” was the big question from the people. This is why the prophesy begins with the affirmation above: God is God. Not just God of Israel. Yahweh is the Almighty Sovereign of the entire cosmos. All stand under divine authority – including human history. There can be no such thing as an absence of God, whatever the faithful might feel in their hearts at times.

Here we have the prophetic challenge in a nutshell: can believers cease from lamenting what they feel is an absence of God and rather begin the faith search for the presence of God? The four verses prior to today’s reading are vital for understanding the prophet’s message: *You have spoken harsh words against me, says Yahweh. Yet you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’* ¹⁴ **You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before Yahweh Almighty?’** ¹⁵ **Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape.’**

What is going on here?

The story here should not be unfamiliar to believers today. How often it is we find an expectation that believers should somehow have a blessed life on account of the time, resources and energy they believe they have poured into their religious activities? Surely all of that is worth something? Why it is that in our present moment in human history, two thousand plus years after the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ of God, the poor grow poorer, the exploited more and more exploited while power, authority and wealth continues to grow among but a tiny proportion of the world’s population? While in Christ there are no more divisions between “Jews” and “Greeks” our priorities remain with ourselves, our own and those with whom I feel I have a connection? Implied in all of this is how it is somehow the fault of God that millions suffer and die from hunger, preventable diseases, wars, natural disasters and the like. In those suffering masses there are Christians like ourselves, faithful Church goers who suffer the same as the sinner and sometimes even moreso.

As it is with so many of the prophets, Micah stresses the importance of worshipping and obeying God – because God is God and we are creatures. Bargaining with God will not work. Finding our God as **God-with-me** in all things is the key to a life of peace and joy. Only when we find **God-with-me** will we then move to obeying the will of God and the will of God is about loving others, serving others rather than prioritising love of self and serving ourselves. God then does the rest.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

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Our present “age” is not the full story of human existence

We grow old. We get sick. We die. Sometimes that death comes in an unexpected second through an accident or act of violence. We return to the dust from which we came. And then? This is a part of the background to the question being discussed by Jesus in our Gospel today. These Sadducees want to ensure the vision of Jesus fits into their own understanding of what it means to be a human. For them our human existence begins with birth and ends with death. We go to the grave and that is it. No more life. No resurrection. Nothing. What counts in that short span of life on this earth.

With this kind of perspective it is not difficult to see why these people want to have a way of measuring the meaning of “being human”. They want to be able to measure it in terms of achievements, accolades from others; in things done, accumulated and recorded. It is a way of thinking rampant in our contemporary western world and sits at the very heart of the social evils and enormous suffering we find across the globe.

There is more to our existence than our time on this planet

In his reply, Jesus builds on the Hebrew theology of his own time. The life we have, the life we share is *divine life*, a share of God’s own. *Life-breathed-into-us* at the time of creation. At the core of our being is this *image and likeness of God*, the primary source of who we are. We are like nothing else in the entire cosmos, the only creatures intentionally formed in this way by God the Creator of all things. But it does not end there. Humans were then sent out into the newly created world live as unique and important manifestations of the presence of God in creation.

They were to share the work of creation – be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. And they were to *rule over, conquer, be masters over*, the world. This is not permission to exploit creation but rather to be in the world as God is in the world. They are co-creators with God and are to collaborate with God in the divine plan for all the Almighty has created. Each and every man, woman and child has been chosen by God to share in this mission. Everyone is significant and every life has a purpose. This is not measured in terms of output and performance. It comes from the God who made us, the God with whom we share an element of divine life. We remain creatures - but God’s creatures.

In God all are alive

This is the great revelation brought to us in Jesus. It is in His life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven that we have an opportunity to return to our original vocation and to relieve the world of a heavy burden. We are now able to access the *God-breathed-life* that makes us who we are. We can find the kind of peace and harmony we see in the Garden of Eden in the opening of chapter 3 of Genesis. Not only do we share a common humanity with every human person on this world of ours, but we also share a common gift of salvation, of liberation, grace and power.

What our Sadducees fail to understand it how the resurrection of Jesus will change everything. No more will death define the limits of human living. While we do not know what form life beyond the grave will take, what we do know is the life we have now will, in Christ, be transformed and continue on beyond the grave. As Genesis 3 understands, what returns to the dust and ends is but the body. The *breath* that is our share in divine life endures.

What this also means is how our primary vocation is to grow ourselves so that we are shaped and driven by this inner divine life. We assess ourselves in terms of the clarity with which we reflect Christ’s life and teachings in our own words and deeds and for this all we need is grace freely given.

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