

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“How could you say those things to me?” “What did I say now?”

We promise to do better. Sometimes there’s punishment Getting grounded. No TV, or worse..no cell phone. Sometimes we try to make up, even with flowers and a card for her, a favorite homemade dinner for him. Malachi says if we do not serve God, we will burn like stubble in an oven, root and branch. Roots even.

Well, **if** we are really sorry, we try to change, right? Into a better relationship....whether at home, at work, here at church with this family, AND with God. Notice I said AND God, not or. And, for it to be real, we have to actually do some “pruning” of our old selves by getting rid of some attitude, or action, or something. We actually have to “die” a little bit in order to grow into someone better.

You would think that Jesus, as the light of the world and the savior of humanity, would pick up the tone somewhat. But his message seems REAL dismal. Wars and insurrections that must happen. Great earthquakes. Famines. Plagues. Election choices among absolutely terrible options....well, maybe not that last one, but he could have. As I said, REAL dismal.

And just so his listeners to all this wouldn’t feel left out....they will arrest YOU..and persecute YOU betrayed by family, and put YOU to death. Jesus reminds us that living also means shock to the soul....such as the Temple being destroyed then, or planes destroying our temples of security now.

In the more insecure world since September 11, we are called to live the present moment in faithfulness and love. This is the training and preparation for the future. Only if we live now will we be ready for whatever the future brings. We can not put our trust in tall and beautiful buildings, in the government, in any wealth, in any worldly power as our temples of security.

Our perseverance in faith to God and one another is what will save us.

Our “temples of security” can also be the most minimal thing.

Some of you know my family interest and love for trains. Years ago, while at university in Ohio, I got in the car with 2 or 3 friends for a trip along the a rail line heading west across Indiana and

into Illinois. Now, until going to school in Ohio, I was a lifelong New Yorker, lived in different places upstate and went to college in Buffalo. So, I was used to...and very familiar and comfortable with...our state's rolling hills and mountains and trees and so on.

Even in Ohio, as flat as it was and covered by corn for as far as you could see, there was still a sense of limited distance. But finally, on this trip, we came to a small village...the name which I do not remember...that had a sign saying "Welcome to ?. The Gateway to the West". There was nothing distinctive about the town...perhaps smaller than the size of Sylvan Beach, with trees, and houses, and a small downtown area, and grain elevators. But....going out the other side.....was nothing.

Flat Nothingness....as far as one could see...in all directions.

I lost the security of familiar scenery. No fences, no trees, no borders or limits or boundaries. I was afraid of the change. It seems so minor now, all these years later, but I remember it so clearly in its affect upon me. It was a shock to me, my sense of security.

It is human to be afraid of the unknown. And it is natural that just being alive and passing through time causes us to age, to become ill and to eventually die. We all wear down, and come to know a world where there is pain, and suffering and sorrow, because we live in a broken world.

So, what are we to do? Nothing but be steady in our faith in Christ. Our Lord came to bring justice to our world. The heresy that most plagues the Church still is the one in which we imagine that our actions will fix our world, that our virtue is what will save us.

Malachi, Paul and Luke, each in his own way, speaks to us today. Each of them says, in effect, "I have a vision for tomorrow and here is how it looks." God will come, says the prophet. God is with us, says the gospel. The Christian faith speaks a word -- a word of hope. The future has a name; that name is Jesus. And in that face we see the full splendor of God's love.

When the people sought some reassurance about their future, Jesus gave them one simple response. Take care of business. Live faithfully now and you will be prepared for whatever the future brings. There is no need for us to be afraid. As followers of Christ, we have nothing to fear about the end of time. Nothing to fear about death or the end of the world. We will not be immune to the pain of this world, but by our endurance we will gain our lives.

Another memory from years ago was the ending of another long period of seminary-led instruction. One of the other priest postulants has a special gift from God mixing together his horticulture interest with a ministry in Christian spirituality. At our evening service, he shared a poem

written by some Mennonite worshipers he worked with to commemorate their time together of planting and praying. The part I remember is:

The love of new life that to seed first must die;  
to erupt in beauty under God's caring eye.

Whatever the future may hold, God can be trusted to see us through. In the meantime, keep faith and faithfulness by doing whatever it is God is calling us to do. Live for today, hope for tomorrow and rest on the promise that Christ is coming in His due time...keeping in mind that in order to live....individually, or together, or as the church....we must allow some death, some "pruning" of the old in order to grow into someone better by the grace of God.

The grace that is woven into the eternal, intimate dance of love between the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.