

November 17, 2019

**Sermon Title: “Focused and Unafraid” | Second in a Series on our “Life Together”
23rd Sunday after Pentecost**

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin

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Malachi 4 - But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Two weeks ago, at the end of my first sermon here, I invited you to think about what it would look and sound like if we became famous for confessing our sins to God and to one another, so that God’s grace could sweep over and be in charge of our life together. Last week, in the closing paragraph of our sermon, we learned that when the grace of God is sweeping over us and in charge, we would be see ourselves as part of a rescue team which goes out looking for people who need to be assisted in the strong Name of Jesus.

Today we continue our series of sermons on our life together, and we learn from the prophet Malachi that in the end times, the people of God will be focused and unafraid. First of all we focus on what it means to live through the end times unafraid, and secondly what it means to be focused on the mission of the Church which is to make disciples of all nations.

My dad’s “no animals in the house” rule

One of my memories growing up on a farm in southeastern North Dakota is that my dad had a strict “no animals in the house rule,” with one exception. While on the one hand dogs and cats were absolutely not allowed in the house, no matter how hard my sisters begged, there was one creature permitted and even carried in for some tender, warm, and loving care. That creature was the occasional white faced hereford calf who had the misfortune to be born during a spring blizzard. I can still see my dad bringing in that little calf wet and practically freezing to death, setting it near the kitchen register, and seeing to it that it survived. My other memory of those calves is that they would go into our barn until the weather cleared up, and when the time was right, we could let those calves out of the barn where they would go kicking and jumping and leaping for joy out into the sunshine. This picture Malachi would offer us today in the very last chapter of the Old Testament, a picture of Christians traveling together into the very troublesome end times absolutely unafraid, and even more than that, with a joy that is as contagious as it can be.

Truth #1 about the end times is that believers will be like calves leaping for joy in the spring time. (Unafraid)

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The last chapter of the Old Testament talks about Judgment Day. It will be a day of wild extremes. Unbelievers will be like chaff which is swept away in the fires of eternity, but believers will be like the grain harvested safely into the bins. Those not repenting of their sins will be like dry trees and branches burning out of control, but those repenting will see what they have been looking for. The Sun of Righteousness will rise in the horizon, and there will be healing in its wings. Those who have been living in darkness have seen a great light, and in that day, it will be peeping above the horizon and leaping into the sky in all of its splendor.

In the end times, Christians will be living as people who understand what it means to be set free. Like white faced herfords kicking and frolicing in the spring sunshine, God’s people know their sins have been forgiven, and they are as glad as they can be in knowing that.

On the last day, saints will be streaming into their final pasture. The Good Shepherd has kept his promises, and into eternity, they will be lying down in green pastures and be led near the still waters.

Dear friends in Christ, today I invite you one more time to bring all of your anxieties and all of your fears to the communion rail and know that Jesus Christ is here to hold you close. The sins of your past have been washed away in the blood of the Lamb, and your future is secure in the arms of your Savior. No matter how deep are your regrets, the love of your God is deeper. No matter how wide is your guilt, the forgiveness of sins is wider. No matter how long are your bad habits, the grace of your God is longer.

Like calves released from their stalls who go out frolicing on a spring morning, so are the Lord’s mercies new towards you every time the sun comes up in the east, with no exceptions. As often as you cry out for mercy, mercy is yours. Fear gives way to courage, confusion gives way to clarity, sadness gives way to a joy only God can provide.

Malachi closes out the Old Testament with these words about the end times.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

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Truth #2 about the end times is that Christian parents and congregations will be putting first things first.

Not only is the Spirit of God teaching us to be unafraid this morning, He is inviting us to be focused. Through Malachi, the Spirit of God would remind us this morning what a treasure we have in the written and spoken Word of God. The Law of Moses here refers to more than the dos and don'ts of the Ten Commandments. It refers to both the law and the Gospel. It refers to the complete revelation of God to his people. It is the Word of God which is able to make us wise unto salvation and to train us for holy living. It is the Word of God which gives us a blueprint for being saved by the grace of God through faith alone in Jesus Christ. It is the Word of God which, in the language of our Epistle lesson for today teaches us not to become weary in doing good works, but to keep on putting one foot in front of the other. In the words of Jesus as recorded by Luke 21, staying focused means staying awake spiritually so that our hearts don't get weighed down with drunkenness and worldly concerns.

Dear friends in Christ, this morning I invite you to bring all of your distractions to the foot of the cross, and to see Jesus clearly. See Him putting first things first. By that I mean to say, see Jesus setting His face towards Jerusalem and refusing to be distracted until His father saw to it that all of his wrath, all of his righteous anger had been poured out on his one and beloved Son. See Jesus suffering all that we needed him to suffer, see him dying the death we needed him to die, see all of your sins and mine washed away, see all of your guilt and mine gone, see one more time this morning in Christ, the one thing needful - that the hearts of the parents and the grandparents here today get turned towards our children and our grandchildren. Understand the responsibility of each generation to pass along the baton of the Christian faith to the next generation. Ask yourselves as a congregation and as an individual, are we putting first things first and second things second in this place, in these days.

The kingdom of God is like a medium sized church in a medium sized city full of dozens of folks leaving church today with a peace that goes beyond their circumstances, no matter how difficult. They leave church today unafraid of what the future might bring, and even more than that, they leave with a gladness that is hard to explain and with a joy that is contagious. Their hearts turn again and again to the next generation, they wonder together what they can do to make their church like a city of lights set on a hill hard to ignore. They go looking this week for dark corners in their neighborhoods where they might let their light so shine that others might see their good works and give glory to their God. By the grace of God and moved by the Holy Spirit they go out from this place unafraid and focused. In Jesus' Name. Amen