

“Preparing the way of peace”

Reflection: December 8, 2024 Rev'd Ian Brown

Malachi 3: 1 – 4,
Luke 1: 76 - 79

I read all sorts of books. Contemporary Australian and International authors. Classics of fiction; Covid lockdown saw me get through *The Count of Monte Christo* and *War and Peace*. But Malachi is not on my list of favourite reads, there are some withering criticisms dished up here, so not very peaceful! We really don't know much about the writer. The book's title comes from the Hebrew, *mal'ak*, it means ambassador, angel or messenger. It begins, “The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.” – then footnote: *by my messenger*.

Malachi slots in as last of the minor prophets in the ordering of most bibles, so just before Matthew. He opens a host of issues and leaves blank the small matters of who and how and when, but it's colourful and sharply targeted imagery;

‘See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, ... indeed, he is coming, says the Lord. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi.’

At 961 Celsius, molten silver is a beautiful and dangerous thing! I used to do a little casting with molten silver. We used an oxy-acetylene torch for the heat and a centrifugal casting machine to force the molten metal into the mould. Letting the melted metal fly always made me hold my breath! Glowing bright red, fluid silver takes a huge amount of energy. And it's purified by melting. That's

hot, dangerous work. Malachi seems to be familiar with the technique. Refining metal is used as a metaphor, a striking image for warning.

The refiner's task was hands on and dangerous. Breaking up ore to be melted in a crucible, the heat has to be raised until the ore melted and began to separate from the dross. The image is about cleaning up in preparation for God's long awaited intervention. Like all metaphors, you can't take them too far. The tone of Malachi's images is hot and fiery. Perhaps that fits with John the Baptist's preaching. But Jesus way has a much stronger emphasis on making a difference; the 'dawn from on high that will give light to those in darkness', through peace.

So, we might not think in terms of preparing by burning away the dross, but serious preparation is the mood of Advent, isn't it? Watching for the signs, cleaning up, preparing. Looking at the times and preparation are still relevant. So is looking at the signs in nature. And when we too easily start to think of who or what we might want to apply this imagery to, take a breath and turn the page to Jesus words, and be guided by his 'judge not'.

This gospel calls us to live by a different form of justice and for a different set values. To 'guide our feet in the way of peace'. To practice peace in the way we live our everyday lives. In the turmoil of a warmongering world, competitive to the core, we might do well to take some space, to listen better, to go in a different direction. What if we could embrace Zechariah's words of promise? The Lord guiding our feet in the way of peace! How can we join the voices that cry out for peaceful means of resolving conflicts? How can we nurture peace in our

families and in our churches and neighbourhoods and between nations? How can we help turn leaders feet in the ways of peace for spending on aid and building up community rather than piling up weapons?

On this second Sunday of Advent, hear the good news. Zechariah speaks of John and Jesus and says,

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

He reminds us that there is a task for us here. We also have a role to prepare the way, to open our ears and our lives. Perhaps, if we heard the call to prepare, as an invitation to join in - to be a part of this movement - not as a mental note of, yes that's right! But to do and be the ways of peace ourselves. To be open now to God's coming in Christ, so we can all walk in the way of peace! Prepare the way!