

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

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Remembrance Sunday Scriptures: 14th November 2021

Scriptures: NRSV

Psalm 116:15: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful ones.

Malachi 3:16-18 *The reward of the faithful & Book of Remembrance*

¹⁶Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on His name. ¹⁷They shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts, My special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. ¹⁸Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Mark 13:1-8 *Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple*

¹³As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ²Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” ³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

Revelation 14:13 *Eternal rest*

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

Reflection:

Malachi delivers a message of both reproof & hope to the people of God. He knows that no-one is perfect; no-one is without sin and asks God ‘Who can stand? Who can remove their sin and how can they be cleansed? Malachi describes the day of God’s judgement as burning like an oven! The surge of heat from an oven at maximum temperature is overwhelming and will take your breath away, sometimes along with your eyebrows!!! This is a prophet’s warning to those who are arrogant and engaging with sin: the proud or jealous, those hungry for power and control, the gossip or the vengeful in spirit. All these will be as stubble, burnt without a trace, consumed by God’s refining fire. Malachi and those living in his time and place do not yet have Jesus and are therefore not born again through His sacrifice. Even so, he prepares the hearts and minds of the people to look out for two future messengers: John the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus will be the One who can remove their sin and cleanse the soul. He alone can restore God’s people to a right relationship and re-make them into His likeness.

Whose likeness do we reflect? Do we honour the faith of our forebears? Are we mirroring the behaviour of Jesus?

Malachi also bears good news for those who revere God. The Son of Righteousness will come to them and they will leap out like calves from a stall! Wow! For those who are in awe of God,

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respecting His Word, honouring His Commandments and venerating Him in worship; healing and wholeness will be their reward. Malachi was not addressing those in ignorance of God; the people knew God but their obedience to His Word was half-hearted and compromised. They had lost their sense of urgency and commitment to stay alert in maintaining a right relationship with their Creator. God's people Israel mistakenly neglected His Word and commands believing that their birth-right, as God's chosen people, was enough. Malachi delivers God's message like a two edged sword cutting through the proud and wicked who will be burnt up leaving neither root nor branch! But also assuring those who fear God that they shall be healed and prosper!...*Who has bought their Christmas cards? Who has written their Christmas cards? Who has already posted them?...* We start off with good intention, thinking we have plenty of time, but time flies! We discover the last date for overseas post has been missed; the last date for 1st class has passed, and 2nd class post is only a day away! Suddenly all the time we thought we had has gone! My father had a saying, 'Don't put off till tomorrow what you can get done today!' Apathy will cause us to miss the event and disappear without trace! Doing nothing gives the devil a foothold for evil.

Malachi's prophecy shakes them out of their complacent apathy and wakes them up! Those genuinely seeking God then gathered together to discuss, pray and discern God's will and purpose...and guess what?...God took note and listened to them! Isn't that incredible? What an inspirational, comforting and encouraging sentence this is; "The Lord took note and listened" This promise of God's Word was repeated by Jesus: "Where two or more are gathered in My name, I Am there among them ([Matthew 18:19-20](#)). However, there is no such thing as a free lunch! Malachi was clear on the conditions God asks for: those who gathered to seek God, "Revered the Lord and thought on His name". It was their faithful behaviour and adherence to the Word of God that demonstrated "the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him". *Does our behaviour demonstrate righteousness and faithfulness to the Word of God? Are we staying alert for the day of God's judgement? Do the signs of our time point to the last days?*

About fifteen years before Jesus was born Herod the Great began to remodel and rebuild the temple, which had stood for nearly five hundred years since the days of [Ezra \(6:14-15\)](#). Herod made the temple one of the most beautiful buildings in Jerusalem, but he had an arterial motive. He ruled over the Jews and to make his control easier, he sought to appease them. When someone gives something to us, or does something for us it can place us under obligation, which makes it difficult to refuse a request that we may not agree with. Herod employed this principle to great effect, affording him undue influence over Jewish authority. In answer to the disciples' question, "When will the temple be destroyed", Jesus gave them a prophetic vision of future events and their fulfilment. He prophesied that not one stone would be left upon another; this was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Romans completely destroyed the temple and entire city of Jerusalem. Jesus also explained other events of both near and distant times, which would signal His return. He did this so that His disciples could learn how to live in the present. Considering they lived to see the destruction of Jerusalem, they must have been left in no doubt that everything else Jesus prophesied would also be fulfilled.

What are the signs of the end times? Do we believe the warnings of Jesus or do we have our doubts? What would it take for us to believe Scriptural prophesies of our day and time?

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Some of the Lord's prophesies are yet to be fulfilled and He foretold them that we might remain spiritually alert and prepared at all times, while awaiting His return. We see all too many wars and places of conflict on the news, nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. Human exploitation of God's Creation results in devastating consequences: fires, floods, earthquakes, and famines. But Jesus assures us we need not be alarmed. Instead, we are to stay alert to recognise the beginning of birth pangs signalling Christ's return. Many have claimed to know the time of God's judgement and Jesus warns of many believers being misled by false prophets and teachers before He returns. However, do not be deceived because His return will be according to God's timetable, not that of human beings. There will be no mistaking the Lord when He returns, it promises to be the most dramatic event ever! We either choose to believe Scripture as God's living Word or reject it; there are no grey areas to hide in or dispute. If we believe God's Word we honour God; if we doubt it we doubt God along with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus warns; "Let no one lead you astray". We would do well to heed His warning, remain faithful and stay alert to recognise the signs.

Are we being misled by false prophets, teachers and leaders? What are we being fed concerning the meaning of Scriptural Truths? Do the leaders of our day follow the Lord's example or reinterpret His teaching?

The Church of God is contained within the hearts and souls of His people. The faithful remnant will be saved on the day Jesus returns and God delivers judgement, but those who stray from the commands of His Word will not. There are wars we can see and there are wars in heavenly realms that we cannot see. If we stand against the tide of evil around us and in the world; God will fight the battles raging in heavenly realms on our behalf and the Kingdom of God will rise victorious! On this day of remembering those who have gone before us and made a stand for justice, righteousness and peace; Father God, may it be so. **Amen!**

Revelation 14:13 *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

Hymn/Song: When Peace Like a River Attendeth My Soul (It is Well With My Soul)

By Horatio Gates Spafford-1873- *composer* Philip Bliss

This hymn was written after traumatic events in Horatio Spafford's life: the death of his two year old son and the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which ruined him financially. As a successful lawyer, he had invested significantly in property in the area of Chicago extensively damaged in the fire. The economic downturn of 1873 also hit his business interests preventing him, at the last minute, from travelling to Europe with his family on the *SS Ville du Havre*. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship sank rapidly after a collision with another vessel, the *Loch Earn*, and all four of Spafford's daughters died. His wife Anna survived and sent him a telegram simply saying: "Saved alone...". Shortly afterward, while sailing to meet his grieving wife, he passed near where his daughters had died and was inspired to write these words. Philip Bliss named the tune *Ville du Havre*, in memorial.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Refrain:

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It is well with my soul; It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul... *Refrain:*

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!... *Refrain:*

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul... *Refrain:*

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!... *Refrain:*

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul... *Refrain:*

Poem: *In Flanders Fields* by Major John McCrae

On 2nd May 1915, a young Canadian artillery officer, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, was killed by an exploding German artillery shell in the gun positions near Ypres. A Canadian military doctor, artillery commander and friend, Major John McCrae, was serving in the same unit. The chaplain had been called away on duty somewhere else, so as the brigade doctor, he was asked to conduct the burial service for Alexis. It is believed that later that evening after the burial, John penned a draft of the following poem: "In Flanders Fields"

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead, short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

Take up your quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

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Prayer:

Lord of the past, present and future, You are with us in the small quiet moments and the loud, busy times of each day. Help us to recognise You in the people we meet and situations we face. Bless our words and actions with Your forgiving grace. Help us to live knowing that Jesus surrounds us, and His presence resides deep within our hearts; give us, we pray, the courage to live in grace and peace and love as faithful people of God. **Amen!**