



Advent II - December 7-8, 2024

Malachi 3:1-7

*"Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*

*2 "But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. 3 He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord. 4 Then once more the Lord will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.*

*5 "At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*

6 *"I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. 7 Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*

*"But you ask, 'How can we return when we have never gone away?'"*

As we begin the second week of Advent, it might be our wish to settle more and more deeply into comfort and joy. And yet, what we have in our Scripture reading today is a warning. But it's a *good news* warning. The prophet warns that the one God's people "look for so eagerly, is surely coming." But when he comes, he will be like a blazing refiner's fire.

1. The Lord is coming.

- a. When Advent comes each year, do you primarily focus on waiting to remember Christmas?
- b. Or do you focus on watching and waiting for Jesus to come again in power and glory?
- c. What kinds of feelings rise in you when you think about watching and waiting for Jesus to come again?

2. He is like a fire.

- a. What emotions do you feel when you look at the state of the world around you?
- b. Do you bring these feelings to God?
- c. What image of God's power and justice and ability to make all things right resonates most with you? The great lion? The blazing fire? The Good Shepherd? Something else?

3. He is like a refiner.

- a. What is the importance of the distinction that the Lord is like a refiner's fire?
- b. Have you ever had the sense that God is using the circumstances of your life, your work, or your relationships to refine you in his fire?
- c. Have you asked God to show you what in your life needs to be burned away to bring you to greater purity?

- d. Have you shared these things with trusted people in your life?
  - e. Have you ever struggled to believe that you are precious in God's eyes?
  - f. Ask Him to come near today and help you to know this truth deeply.
4. He does not change.
- a. Are you tempted to stay away from God because of the "impurities" you see in your own heart and life?
  - b. If so, what beliefs or fears are behind that urge?
  - c. We must come close to God for him to refine us, and his mercies are new every morning. He is always more ready to run and meet us than we are to turn and come back to him. Do you believe this?

