

November 20, 2016
Malachi 3:13-18

Proper 29C
Hard Word Against God

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Throughout history, Christians have spoken *up* for God. Take for example St. Paul and the rest of the apostles. There's also Stephen in the New Testament and countless others. There are the church fathers such as St. John Chrysostom and Augustine among others. There's Martin Luther, Martin Chemnitz and more from the Reformation era. Now today, we can look at a whole host of examples...David Green the CEO of Hobby Lobby is just one example.

Today, we hear more and more strong words, words hard to hear, harsh words, spoken *against* God, words of defiance. Words by which people think they declare independence from God. You hear it all over our culture. "If God is so good, I'll believe in him, if he grants me_____." – People think God can be bargained with. "All gods leave to the same place, it's just a different route." – even though Jesus says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" "God created the world, that's foolish talk, you can't create out of nothing." – you might hear in schools and other scientific areas and even on your own TV and computer. You speak against God in your own life as you throw his name around in vain. You speak against God as you seek to control your own life. You speak against God when you don't stand up for him when others are speaking against him or even speaking against one of His children. Remember, he has said, "*Whatever you do to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do also unto me.*" You speak against God when you refuse to spread His message to your family, friends, and neighbors. And so much more. Words are spoken against God today, and you contribute to those words.

"Your words have been hard against me," The Lord Says through His prophet Malachi in this morning's text, and he calls his people to account for those words, their hard words against him. "*Evildoers think they can put God to the test and even escape.*"

What about us? When have you and I been tempted to say, "It's useless to serve God!" "Where's my cut God?" When do I GET what's coming to me?" "Doesn't God want me to be happy? Hello? God? Are you really there?" As though we can persuade him into doing what we want, put him to the test, bend him to our will, whether it is really for our good or not.

So the Lord, by His prophet, bids us to look up from ourselves to see Him, to fear Him, to repent and stand in awe of him, and to trust His promises. We cannot speak against Him or test Him, but He bids us look back and remember all his works for us. Even when it seems as if God is far away, when we are tempted to speak against him or put him to the test, he leads us to remember His promises, to remember that he will never forget his people. We have no need to test God or speak against Him."

God ALWAYS keeps His promises and in Jesus makes us His Treasured Possession.

“Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’” Listen! – Just listen! – to the whole charge against God’s people bring against Him: ¹⁴ You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? ¹⁵ And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’ ”¹

Hear what they are saying? “God doesn’t care about us. We’re his people” – supposedly!— “but we don’t get any better deal than the people who ignore him, do whatever they want. They don’t get punished; they get off scot-free. We’re wasting our time being people of Yahweh.”

Well, let’s do a factcheck. The prophet reports that those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord heard! He paid attention and caused to be written *“a book of remembrance...before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.”*

What happens when the Lord remembers? It’s not that he recalls something he’d forgotten, but that he holds his promises up for all to see. HE remembers his covenant. He remembers his people. They are engraved on his hand. That is, He keeps His promises.

How do we know that God keeps his Promises? Our book of remembrance is written down here in the Scriptures, the Word of God. And the Word of God does what it says, brings what it promises.

Quite appropriate for the Last Sunday of the Church Year, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. It’s God’s last word to Israel before the fulfillments of his great promise. Next time God comes around, it’s going to be in person—in the person of the promised baby in Bethlehem. It’s going to be four hundred years of waiting, but He *IS* going to come. What God’s Word says, happens!

Just as when God in the flesh, Jesus, told the repentant thief, *“Today you will be with me in paradise,”* and that’s exactly what happened. He was *“delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred [by Jesus himself to his kingdom, for in him] we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

The crowd around Jesus at the cross spoke harsh words, hard words: *“He saved others, let him save himself, if He is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”* Jesus responded with soft words, but far greater words, words far stronger than any other: *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

¹ *Lutheran Service Book Three Year Lectionary.* (2009). Bellingham, WA: Concordia Publishing House.

St. Paul allows us to step back and see the effect on the whole cosmos of God's Word in Jesus: *"that in Him all things hold together...and through him [God reconciles] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."*

In other words, promises were kept. The word of God was fulfilled in the birth, death, and resurrection, and ascension of Christ Jesus.

Now He makes you and me His treasured possession, just as He promised Israel: *"They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession."* Already a thousand years before Malachi, God had said this to His Old Testament people: *"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples."* Now in the New Testament age, He says it to you: *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."*

For the Lord has compassion on us. The Lord says, *"I will spare them as a man spares his son."* Isaiah 63:9 uses the same word to speak of God's compassion, so "to spare" is to "have compassion," or pity, on someone.

The irony here is that while a man spares his son, in the case of **this** Son, the SON OF GOD, God did not spare Him, did not have compassion on Him, but sent Him to the cross. He gave him up to suffering and death. And Jesus could not save Himself from the cross if He wanted and desired to save you and me. But God did it all so that He might have compassion on us, might put our sins on Jesus, and make us his sons and daughters. His promise of everlasting love and compassion is fulfilled in Christ.

So repent of your desire to doubt the goodness of God. Turn from your need to put God to the test; he always keeps His promises. Jesus is the proof. Jesus is the guarantee That God's Word is true.

Our faith may be put to the test by our circumstances but God's purpose is only to refine us, to strip away from us anything that might separate us from Him, and to show us ever more clearly Christ **for you**, Christ **for me**.

Even when we forget, he remembers us. He makes us His own. He restores us when we fall: "Father, forgive them." He remembers us when he comes into His kingdom. He gives us paradise. He has made peace for us, reconciling all things to Himself.

He makes **you** His treasured possession, putting His name on **you** in baptism and speaking His forgiveness to **you**. By the power of His Word in Baptism, He unites You with the death and resurrection of Jesus. For his Word does not simply convey information; His Word does what it says, it brings what it promises. You can count it!

Baptized into Christ, you have been clothed in Christ. You are marked out for God's own possession. You bear his name. He gives you His Spirit as the down payment on all His promises.

By His Word, he has spared you, had compassion on you, saying your sin is forgiven you. And when HE speaks, It is done!

In the Sacrament of remembrance, as often as we "do this in remembrance" of him, he remembers his promise; and by His Word, he places into your mouth His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. His Word does what it says.

So whatever your circumstances in life otherwise, you will go out from this place as God's treasured possession. You live in the promise kept. You have His Spirit to speak up *for* Him. You know that Jesus is KING from the cross and from His open and empty grave. You know he has reconciled to himself all things, making peace by the blood of His cross, also with you. And as this Last Sunday of the Church Year directs us to look forward to Jesus' return, yes, and when HE returns, "*You **shall** see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.*" He has never forgotten that!

There is no need to test God, no need to speak against him, for He keeps his promises. "*He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...that in everything he might be preeminent.*" Your name is written in His book of life. He will remember you always. His Word does what it says!

In Jesus name! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard you hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.