

## *“A Memory Book”*

March 18, 2007

God remembers. We forget. God remembers His promises. He keeps His word. We forget that. We look around at our circumstances and they do not look like what God promised. We ask, **Malachi 2:17 (NRSV) “Where is the God of justice?”**<sup>1</sup> Perhaps we even get discouraged enough to say **Malachi 3:14 (NRSV) “It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the LORD of hosts?”**<sup>2</sup> The gap between promise and fulfillment seems to grow wider everyday. What’s the point of being a Christian? Why bother? Why not join in with the rest and “eat, drink, and be merry” and then sleep in on Sunday morning?

We preachers are often guilty of “preaching to the choir.” We preach sermons aimed at the people who are not here, but Malachi’s message is aimed at the faithful, at those who are struggling to keep the faith in a culture that is corrosive to faith. Here is the point of gathering on Sunday morning: **Malachi 3:16 (NRSV) Then 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.**<sup>3</sup>

What we do may not seem to matter. No one may notice, but God notices. God hears, and God remembers. Our worship matters to God, and God remembers what we’ve done. To help us remember, we will open God’s memory book and explore – “Can you hear me now,” and “Return to Sender.”

Ω *“Can You Hear Me Now”*

Technology is wonderful, when it works. When it doesn’t work, it is wearisome! A certain cell phone company has a comic series of ads that speaks to this frustration. The bespectacled everyman takes a few steps and speaks into his cell phone, “Can you hear me now?” Of course we can, but when we’re trying to have a conversation and the call keeps getting dropped or the signal cuts in and out, “Can you hear me now?” isn’t so funny. We get tired of trying to hear and trying to be heard and hang up. It’s not worth the frustration.

Technology is wonderful when it works. When it doesn’t work, and despite all our efforts, it continues not to work, then it’s time to call technical support. Once

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

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we get to a human, after pressing 1 for this, and 3 for that, and entering our account number repeatedly, we finally get to talk to someone who has the knowledge and the training to hear what we are going through, diagnose what may be the cause, and guide us in making the necessary changes that will fix our problem.

Malachi is our spiritual support person. What are we experiencing? Our faith doesn't seem to be working. Going to church used to inspire us, but now we feel like we're just going through the motions. We work harder and harder, but we don't seem to be getting anywhere. We feel disconnected from God and from one another, and we don't know how to get through. Our faith doesn't seem to be working.

It wasn't always this way. We remember when; we remember when our pews were full, our treasury was full, and our Sunday School was full. We remember when the church spoke and everyone listened. We remember when the church challenged society to solve its problems and society had to listen!

If only God would come and make all things right! If only God would restore the church to where we were in days of old!

Be careful what you wish for. You may get it. **Malachi 3:2 (NRSV) 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.**<sup>4</sup>

What if God is at work in the church, not despite the fact that things don't seem to be working, but through the frustration? What if our struggles are part and parcel of God's process of refining us? What if God is taking the church to a place where it hasn't been for a very long time; a place of complete and absolute dependence on God and God's word? What if all these challenges are God's way of saying, “Can you hear me now?”

Ω *Return to Sender, Address Known*

We're getting the message. What do we do? **Malachi 3:7 (NRSV) Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.**<sup>5</sup>

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I believe God is inviting us to re-discover what it means to be the church – the people of God called together by God, sent into the world by God, to bear witness to God’s love for the world. I believe our current struggles are God’s invitation to return to our Sender and be made new. I believe there is a future with hope for Pennside Presbyterian Church.

It’s so easy to lose sight of who we are. It’s so easy to become a purveyor of religious goods and services competing for market share. It’s so easy to become society’s chaplain – saying the proper prayers at the proper times in the proper ways. It’s so easy to go through the motions and forget that God has sent us to be His witness in the world.

We forget, but God remembers. **Malachi 3:16 (NRSV) Then 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.**<sup>6</sup>

We have God’s memory book. We have the Bible – the record of the conversations of those who revered the Lord. We can listen in. We can learn from their experiences. We can re-connect to the spiritual power that gave the church life and equipped us to turn the world upside down.

Going back to the Bible is a popular slogan in the church, but it usually means “let’s make the Bible say what we want it to say and impose our point of view on others.” If we do this, we’re not going back to the Bible. We’re making the Bible come to us.

**Malachi 3:7 (NRSV) Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts... how shall we return?**<sup>7</sup>

We return by listening to the Bible for the word of God. We return by confessing that we do not have all the answers, we do not know the way, but oh God, we long to walk in it; we long to experience the presence of God in our lives in a way that makes all things, even us, new! We return to our Sender confident that God will make His address known.

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We forget, but God remembers. He asks through our trials, “Can you hear me now?” He invites us to return to Him – to listen for His word in the humble confidence that God has something more to say to us. When we’re ready to listen, God is ready to speak; He’s written it down in a memory book. Amen.