

**A harvest of righteousness**  
**A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill**  
**Sunday December 5, 2021**

Malachi 3:1-4, Luke 1:68-79, Luke 3:1-6, Phil. 1:3-11

All of our passages this morning, or at least 3 or the 4 link The Day of the Lord with righteousness.

From Malachi:

*"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 he will refine them like gold or silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness."*

From Luke 1, from Zechariah's Prophecy, he speaks of God's mercy and plan to save his people, saying;

*"that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days."*

Luke 3 John's message is about repentance so that God's people might live lives of righteousness.

Philippians 1 the Apostle Paul's prayer is that in the Day of the Messiah,  
*"You might be pure and blameless, having produced a harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."*

As we prepare for the Day of the Messiah, the coming of our Lord, we are, according to these four passages,

- 1) to present offerings to the Lord in righteousness,
- 2) serve God in holiness and righteousness,
- 3) repent and live lives of righteousness, and finally,
- 4) produce a harvest of righteousness.

The book of Malachi is an interesting book.

It's a short book, largely about the offerings that were being brought to God. The prophet Malachi accused the people of robbing God because they didn't bring their full tithe, their full 10% of their earnings to God in their offering.

The prophet told them that God did not accept their offerings because they were offering sick animals – the last and least of what they had, not the best and first. He asked them how an earthly king would receive a gift of a lame or blind, or sick animal, so how much more their offering was an affront to the God of heaven and earth.

Presenting our offerings to God in righteousness in right relationship to God and to one another means that we give to God first.

When you created your budget, or your family budget, what was first? As Christians we are to put God first in our lives, and one of the ways we live that is to give our offerings to God first.

Some of you might wonder if I follow my own advice in giving and the answer is "yes." Mark and I give our tithe, our 10% to the church, and then we give other offerings as well. We give a percentage of our income, and as income changes so do our offering.

But there is more to righteous giving than just giving God our first and our best. Malachi, as with most other prophets, linked giving offerings to God with how the people treated the labourers in their fields, the poor and the vulnerable. God would not accept their offerings while they were living contrary to the statutes God had set out for their relationships with those around them, especially the poor.

Righteousness, in Malachi had to do with a right relationships with God and with others, especially the poor. Right relationship with God meant bringing God their first and best offerings, their full tithe, not stingily giving as little as possible, but in joy offering God their adoration and bringing gifts from that love. Right relationships with their neighbours

meant paying labourers fairly and on time. It meant caring for the poor and not taking advantage of them.

## **Righteousness means right relationships.**

When we turn to Luke's gospel we hear that God's people were being saved so that they could serve God without fear in holiness and righteousness all their days. God was stepping into the midst of our world and setting things right, but consider the expected response. When we consider why God set things right, the culture around us jumps to the conclusion that when things are right in the world, then I can do and have what I want.

But God's purpose is very different. God sets things right so that we might serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness. Holiness is being set apart for God's purposes and righteousness is right relationships between us, and God, and one another. So, God enters the world, and sets things right in the world so that we might live for God's purposes in right relationship with God and one another.

John's message from Luke 3 is about our need to repent.

The prophet enters time and space and invites people to examine their lives in that day. Advent comes, this season with purple candles – penitential purple- calling us to examine our lives, so that we might indeed be prepared when our Lord comes.

So how are you doing this day? This advent December 2021, are you bearing a harvest of right relationships with God and with others?

Are you giving God your best and the first of all you have joyfully? Are you caring for the poor, the people working for you, for the orphans and the widows, the vulnerable and those with less power? Are your relationships with others ordered by God's love?

Take to heart the words of John the Baptizer that we are to prepare a way for our God. The Apostle Paul, who wrote the letter to the

Philippians, prays for God's people. His prayer is that we might be pure and blameless, having produced a harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Right relationships happen in Jesus Christ. We will never get it right apart from Christ Jesus. We will never be at peace with God, get our act straightened out, unless first we are in Christ.

John's gospel tells us to abide in Jesus, and he in us that we will bear fruit, the same harvest of righteousness that Paul was describing. There is a wonderful assurance in Paul's words. Paul says that he is certain that the one who began this good work in us will bring it to completion.

I hear those words and hope. I did not begin the good work of the gospel in my life- God did, through the work of the Holy Spirit. I cannot bring this work to completion- only Christ Jesus can. The assurance from Paul, is that Jesus will bring it to completion in us.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is at work in us. He works in the midst of our circumstances each day. He is infinitely patient with us and never gives up on us. God is completely wise, he is our Creator, so he knows us altogether. And so we have the assurance that God is able to complete what he began in us.

As we come to our Lord's table we are invited to examine ourselves and consider:

- 1) are we presenting offerings to the Lord in righteousness,
- 2) serving God in holiness and righteousness,
- 3) repenting and live lives of righteousness, and finally,
- 4) producing a harvest of righteousness.

*And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness, the harvest of right relationships that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.*

Thanks be to God.