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Last Sunday of the Church Year & Proper 29
November 23, 2025
Text: Malachi 3:13 – 18
Title: A Hard Word Against God? (based on a sermon from CPR)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Christians are used to speaking up for God, but more and more today we hear strong words, harsh words, spoken *against* God, words of defiance from His human creatures. Words by which people think to declare independence from God. You hear it all over our culture. “I can’t believe in Him. I won’t believe in Him. He’s a myth, a fairytale.”

“Your words have been hard against me,” the Lord says through His prophet Malachi in today’s Old Testament reading, 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 or I been tempted to say, It’s useless to serve God! What’s in it for me, and when do I get what’s coming to me? Doesn’t God want me to be happy? Hello God? Are you even really there? As though we can persuade God into doing what we want Him to do, put Him to the test, bend Him to our will, whether or not it’s for our own good.

So the Lord, by His prophet, bids us look up from ourselves to see Him, to fear Him, to repent and stand in awe of Him, and to trust in His promises. We can’t speak against Him or test Him, but He bids us look back and remember all His works for us. Even when it seems 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, because God always keeps His promises, and in Jesus He makes each of us His treasured possession.

“Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’” These are the words that Malachi writes in the first verse of today’s text. Listen, really listen, to the whole charge that God’s own people bring against Him. They tell the Lord, “‘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? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’”

Do you get what God’s people are saying to Him here? They’re saying, “God doesn’t really care about us. We’re supposed to be His people, but we don’t get any better deal with Him than the people who just ignore Him and do whatever they want. They don’t get punished. They get off scot-free! We’re just wasting our time being the people of Yahweh! What good is faith?” Were they right? Did they have an honest complaint against God?

The Lord’s prophet, Malachi, has a different take on things. He says that those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord heard them! He paid attention to them, and caused “a book of remembrance” to be written. Malachi says that it’s a book that was “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 that He had forgotten, but that He holds His promises up for all to see. He remembers His covenant. He remembers His people just like He says in Exodus 28:12. His people are engraved in His hand as He says through Isaiah. All of this is to say that the Lord keeps His promises.

And how can we know that the Lord keeps His promises? We have our own book of remembrance given to us by God, in His Holy Word. And the Word of God does what it says it does, it brings exactly what God promises that it brings.

It’s very appropriate at the end of the Church Year for us to read from the prophet Malachi which has been chosen as the last book of the Old Testament. It’s God’s last word to the people of Israel before the fulfillment of His greatest promise. Next time God comes to visit His people, Malachi knows that it’s going to be in person – in the person of the promised baby born to a virgin in Bethlehem. It will take Him 400 years to arrive after these words from God’s prophet. The people

will have to wait that long, but they won't wait in vain because He *is* going to come to them. What God's Word says, *always* happens.

In today's Gospel reading we heard from God's Word here in the flesh, Jesus, and He told the repentant thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise," and that's exactly what happened. In our epistle reading from Colossians, we heard that 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 to the Son of God. "He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is the Christ of God, His Chosen One!" With these words His own people mocked Him. But Jesus simply responded with words that were greater, far greater and much stronger than any word that could be spoken against Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Again, in the epistle, St. Paul allows us to step back and to see the effect on the whole universe of God's Words in and through Jesus when he writes, "...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." How is this done? By the keeping of His promise. The Word of God throughout all of human history was first fulfilled in the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Okay, so that was all good and fine back then, but what about now? Now He makes you and me His treasured possession, just as He promised Israel through Malachi, "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 even penned these words, God had said the same thing to His Old Testament people in Exodus 19, "If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples." And He continues this very promise in this New Testament age in I

Peter with the words, “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.” This is a promise that is also mirrored by Isaiah in chapter 63 when he writes the same word to speak of God’s compassion because “to spare” is also to “have compassion” or pity on someone. These two words are synonyms in the Hebrew language.

There is great irony in all of this because while any common man spares his own son, when it comes to *His* own Son, God did not spare Him. He did not have compassion on Jesus. He placed His full wrath against sin on Jesus when He sent Him, His only Son, to the cross. He gave Him up to suffering and death. And Jesus, the Son of God, would not save Himself from the cross because He wanted to save you from God’s righteous wrath. And God did it all so that He might have compassion on us, so that He might put our sins on Jesus, and make us His own 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. You don’t need to doubt because He always keeps His promises! Jesus is the best proof of that. Jesus is the guarantee that God’s Word is true because He *is* God’s Word! Yes, your faith will be put to the test in any number of ways, but God’s purpose is only to refine you, to strip away from you anything that might separate you from Him, and to show you ever more clearly that Christ is *for you*!

Even when you forget these great truths, He remembers you because you are His. He restores you when you sin with the same beautiful words that He spoke from the cross, “Father, forgive them.” He remembers you when He comes into His kingdom. He gives you paradise, and He has made peace for you by reconciling all things to Himself.

He makes you His treasured possession, putting His name on you in Baptism and speaking His complete word of forgiveness. 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 always count on 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 of His promises, and by His Word He has spared you and had compassion on you, saying that your sins are forgiven. When He speaks His Word, "It is finished!"

In the Sacrament of the Altar that we will celebrate in just a few minutes, it's the same thing. We keep that sacrament in remembrance of Him just like He told us to do. He remembers His promise, and by His Word He places His own body and blood into your mouth for the forgiveness of sins.

When you leave here, no matter what is happening in your life outside of these walls, you will go out as God's treasured possession. You will live in the promises that He has kept. You will have His Holy Spirit to speak His Word to you *for* Him. The Word that lets you know that Jesus is King from the manger, to the cross, and to His open and empty tomb. By His Word you know He has reconciled all things to Himself, making peace by the blood of His cross, even with you. It is with His Word that at the end of this Church Year He points us forward to Jesus' return, and when He returns Malachi tells us that "You *shall* see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him." He will never forget that, and He will never forget you!

There is no need to test God. There is no need to speak harsh words against Him because He keeps his promises. "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead...that in everything He might be preeminent." Through faith your name is written in His book of life, and He will remember you forever. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.