

“All Things Have Already Been Resolved”

Malachi 3:13-18

We are celebrating the Last Sunday of the Church Year – the Sunday of the Fulfillment as it is sometimes called. But it is not really the church’s equivalent to a New Year’s Eve celebration. Instead of spending the day looking back at the past year and making resolutions concerning the year to come, we as the church look back at the broken body and spilled blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and we know that all things have already been resolved.

And instead of merely looking forward to the next 365 days, we spend this day looking forward to only one day – the Last Day; the Day in which the Lord returns, brings this world to its end, and separates the righteous and the wicked.

The prophet Malachi said that in that day you shall again “see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who do not serve him.” According to Holy Scripture, we do not live in a world of shades of gray. There are only two kinds of people: righteous and wicked.

Those who serve God are completely righteous in His sight; those who do not serve God are utterly wicked. Jesus said that there are only good trees and bad trees. There are no average trees. There are no somewhat righteous or somewhat wicked people. In the sight of God, you are either one or the other.

Christ told His disciples that on the Last Day, all people will be gathered

together, the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. We see this throughout Paul's letters – in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul wrote: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" [2 Cor. 5:10].

But upon hearing that passage from Paul, our Confessional Lutheran understanding of God and salvation should prick up our ears and ask for clarification. We have been talking about this in Bible class over the past few weeks. In John's Revelation we hear that there are books in heaven in which is written every offense against God's Law; books that will be opened on Judgment Day. Books which hold God's indictment of every sin. The books will be opened and God will judge the people. Jesus says that on that day men will give an account for every careless word they have spoken.

Thankfully, there is another book – The Book of Life in which is written the names of the faithful who have been declared righteous. Malachi calls it a "book of remembrance." The Lord has written your name so that you will always be remembered. It is your sins that He will not remember. They have been forgiven and separated from you – buried with Christ in Baptism.

So you can say that the good things or the bad things we do while in the body are the determining factor in our salvation, as long you have the proper understanding. Jesus paid the ransom price for our sin and took away our guilt. The bad, wicked things we have done are no longer remembered, and we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

Malachi says that on the Last Day "you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and

those who do not serve him.” Those distinctions are what Jesus points out between the sheep and the goats?

To the sheep, our Lord will say: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

And to the goats, our Lord will say: “Depart from me, you who are cursed in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.”

Now, as our Lord says, both groups will say to Him that they don't remember seeing Him in any such predicaments. But what Christ told His disciples of the Last Day is the same that Malachi tells us. Those who serve God have been declared righteous. Only the good deeds of the saints will be remembered. All sins have been separated from you as far as the east is from the west, says the Lord. The words spoken in the Absolution are genuine and meaningful. The forgiveness you receive in the Sacrament is real. Have confidence in the Gospel. Have confidence in the Word of God. What you receive here is not some vain hope.

But for the wicked – for those who see no need to serve the Lord; for those who trust in themselves; for those who view God as a quaint afterthought – God warns them. And just as His Word bring a real and

lasting blessing to the faithful, so also His Word brings a real and lasting warning. Jesus and all the prophets warn of how rejecting God's will has consequences.

Perhaps it is the prophet Amos who best sums up the Lord's attitude toward sin, He says, "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land... skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat. The Lord has sworn by the Pride of Jacob: 'I will never forget anything they have done'" [Amos 8:4-7]. And again, as we hear in John's Revelation, there are books that will be opened, and the indictment against the wicked will be made.

Malachi says that the day will come when the distinction will be clear between the righteous and the wicked, but the distinction is not through the works of man, but through the work of Christ. The Passion of our Lord, His humiliation, suffering, and death has made it possible for you to be counted among the righteous. It is His righteousness that we have put on, so that our Father in heaven no longer sees the dirt and grime of our wicked and sinful nature, but has forgiven us and remembers our sins no more. Therefore, in His eyes we are truly righteous, clean, pure, holy, perfect. And His opinion is the only one that matters.

This day marking the end of the church year is a day to rejoice. We look back at the broken body and spilled blood of Christ and know that our future is secure. There is no need for New Year resolutions. In Christ, all things have already been resolved. Amen.