

February 7, 2021, the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B/The Presentation of the Lord  
*Stuck In the Middle*

**Malachi 3:1-4**

<sup>1</sup>See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight — indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>2</sup>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>3</sup>he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

According to the church calendar we are on the fifth Sunday in ordinary time. Oh, that the times were ordinary. How we long for ordinary. Will we ever get back to normal? Well, no. Things will never be the same after the trauma of this past year when nothing was ordinary and the word unprecedented seemed to be rolling off everyone's tongue. It would have rolled off but for the face mask making it impossible to understand what anyone was saying. The church calendar was designed to get you through the life of Jesus in one year's time. Readings are agreed upon by many Christian denominations that take you on a trip through the Bible on a three year cycle, but they correspond to this annual timeline. The big events are Christmas and Easter with lesser known celebrations like Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, and Pentecost. Each year Jesus gets born, baptized, dies and returns from the dead. There are colors associated with each celebration like purple for penance, red for the Holy Spirit, white for joy and green, like the professor and Mary Ann on Gilligan's Island for all the rest. Green sort of stands for in the meantime. Most of life is lived in the meantime. To quote one of my favorite latter day prophets, "Life is what happens while you're making other plans." Earlier in his too short career he assured us all that "She loves you, and you know that can't be bad, yeah, yeah, yeah."

The Jehovah's Witnesses reject holidays, even birthdays. I have often wondered what life is like for them with no anticipation, no building expectation of the great days

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like Christmas, New Year, Easter, Saint Swithin's Day – that's July 15<sup>th</sup> and if it rains in Winchester on July 15<sup>th</sup> it will continue raining for forty days – make sure your ark is well covered with bitumen and pitch and you've got the pets on board. Of course life without such holiday expectation avoids disappointment when the day comes. No celebration is as good as it could be. Of course it's not as bad as it could be – so far. One problem with being a Christian is living in the meantime. Jesus promised to return and here we are two thousand years later still waiting. The Heinz ketchup of the second coming is still defying gravity in the great wait for someone to show up and show those so and sos who's boss. So we wait, as generations waited before us. We tend to try and make something happen like delusional people who sell all their possessions and trek up Mount Minsi to meet Jesus in the sky.

Malachi preached expectation. The Lord would send a messenger, and woe to you if you don't listen. It won't be wonderful so much as intense with judgement of all your bad stuff and painful extraction while being refined enough to make you better. Oddly this sounds a lot like life as usual to me. Our lives are about being tested and refined with pain acting as a messenger telling you to stop what you're doing because it will lead to massive injury. The thing is we Christians believe the messenger came and most people missed him. How can the world end and nobody notice?

Life is not lived in the big event, it is lived in the meantime. People miss the visitation of God's Spirit because they think everyday things don't matter. Looking for the big miracles they miss all the small amazing every-day stuff that fills ordinary time. Before you thank God that nothing happened today think about all it took for that to occur. How much work God puts into just making your day average and ordinary gets

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overlooked. The wonderful escape, the marvelous good fortune captures our attention so that we may miss the visitation.

My favorite colors are prefer blue-greens, but Alice Walker taught me a lesson. Never ignore the color purple. It's out there and it's hard work for nature to produce purple. Purple dyes were reserved for royalty because the sources of purple are rare and expensive. So God gets, I won't quote Ms. Walker directly, angry when you pass the color purple. Out there scattered among all the other rainbow colors of nature it might be easy to miss, but if you pay attention, in the meantime are these precious gifts and moments.

King David insists on paying for the land to build an altar and the sacrifice he planned to offer God. <sup>2 Samuel 24:24</sup> "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them." What have we to offer? The everyday is precious and time is the most precious commodity of all. It cannot be saved only repurposed and it goes as the ordinary time flies past. Give attention to the meantimes, they are where we live.

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Prayer: Faithful God, you have appointed us your witnesses, to be light that shines in the world. Let us not hide the bright hope you have given us, but tell everyone your love, revealed in Jesus Christ the Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.