

Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 24; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2: 22-40

Father God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

This week is the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany and therefore we are focussed on Jesus the Light of the World. How Christ presents himself to the world and what that means for everyone individually and corporally as the body of Christ. Our lectionary readings today continue to focus on this theme. The prophet Malachi asks who can stand when the messenger arrives and they undergo the purification process; our psalmist details who can attend Temple, who is worthy to come into God's presence. Both writers leave us wondering if we are worthy to be in relationship with God, do we have clean hands and a pure heart, have we never lied, or gone back on a promise? Who is this God who demands perfection from us and how do we live up to these lofty expectations? Can we?

The author of Hebrews writes of Jesus' humanity, of how God needed to be born of flesh so that we might share flesh and blood with him and he, God almighty, creator of the heavens and the earth, might experience all the frailties of humanity, everything we have, are or will experience in our human form. He entered our time and space, became one with us in every respect. He came down to heal, teach, guide provide us with salvation. Jesus did not take human form to aid heavenly beings, he came to earth so that when he suffered and died a human death and then experienced a human resurrection, he conquered death once and for all for all humans stripping Satan of his earthly power over humans once and for all. Jesus our great high priest became our ultimate sacrifice.

In Luke's gospel we are presented with Jesus as a baby, in human form. Mary and Joseph were at the temple to offer their meagre sacrifice of two doves for purification. Mary had recently given birth to Jesus and as such was deemed unclean by Jewish tradition and after the required period, she would make the ritual sacrifice and be deemed ritually clean. This was also the time where the baby, especially a first born male,

would be presented at the temple. You may remember Hannah dedicating her son Samuel to Eli the priest at the Temple of Shiloh.

As Luke informs us this was no ordinary occasion. Upon their arrival they are greeted by an old man, Simeon. He had been waiting for the Messiah and through the presence of the Holy Spirit he immediately recognised that he had arrived. We are told that Simeon was a devout man, perhaps he epitomised the psalmist's description of a man with ritually clean hands, a pure heart, one who had not told a lie and had not gone back on a promise. He had been promised by the presence of the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. His reaction catches Mary and Joseph off guard; if we are honest, this is what the presence of Jesus does for us as well. We may arrive at church expecting the same service, the same rote prayers, the same hymns, watching the time until we can leave and progress with the rest of our day. However, when we come expectantly, like Simeon, we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit: God speaks to us in an empowering way through a stanza in a prayer, through the lyrics of a song, through the message or in the consecration of the elements. When we come expectantly to worship, we will come into the presence of God in a real and personal way.

Is this because of anything we do, or have done? Are we all pure in heart, having never lied or gone back on a promise? I am sure this is true for some of you but, if you suffer from human frailties like myself, it is not. What makes us ritually clean then? Jesus Christ. We cannot do anything to earn salvation and there is nothing we can do to prevent God's love.

In the second part of Luke's gospel we are introduced to Anna, a prophet who also recognised Jesus as the Messiah. Simeon was called to speak to Jesus' parents to prepare them for his ministry and the pain that would ensue for them and for nations, and Anna was chosen to proclaim the truth about Jesus to the people. She spoke about the redemption of Jerusalem, that the people had been awaiting through the promised Messiah; Anna announced his arrival to all who would listen that the prophecy had been fulfilled. Simeon and Anna had prepared hearts; Anna had been at the Temple, day and night praying and fasting as she waited expectantly.

Luke then goes on to say that Jesus grew in wisdom and strength and God's favour was upon him, as it had been on Anna and Simeon, which enabled them to recognise the Messiah, praising God. We can do likewise.

Jesus has presented himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sin. This act of mercy enables each one of us to become acceptable in God's sight. We now have clean hands and a pure heart because Jesus stands as our advocate. Our purpose now is to share this good news with those that God places in our path. We are called to re-present Jesus to the people. To strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. True religion, Jesus' brother James tells us, is pure and undefiled before God the Father: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Who is it that God is asking you to re-present Jesus to? You do not need to be pious, fasting day and night, to share your faith. God places people in your path every day, people who need to hear the gospel, the good news that they are loved by God. As the Church, the body of Christ we are called to re-present Jesus, the Light of the World, to everyone. As individuals, brother or sister of Christ, we are equipped with the gifts and talents we need to fulfil God's purpose. There are plenty of opportunities we encounter every day to be the light in someone's darkness, a listening ear, God's hands and feet. There is always room for more justice, peace, and proclamation of the gospel. As we encounter Jesus through scripture, worship and in our daily lives, may we use these encounters to re-present God's presence to each other.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.