

Sermon 2006 Advent 2

Text: Malachi 3:1-4

Theme: "It's Caustic Lye Soap, and You're Soaking in It!"

Remember the old Palmolive commercial where the woman is soaking her hand in something and talking about how dish detergent damages her hand? Her manicurist, Madge, tells her about how there's a dish detergent that actually helps your hands and the tag line was something like "it's Palmolive and you're soaking in it."

Well, today we hear from the prophet Malachi about a different kind of detergent. The people of God had just barely returned from exile. They had just gotten into worship in their brand spanking new temple in Jerusalem and already they were getting bored with God and sloppy in worship. Their pastors were cheating the Church by skimming off the offerings. They were also teaching false things about God. The people were giving God what they had left over instead of offering him their first and their best. So if you had that one sheep that just never really thrived – use it for sacrifice instead of that nice healthy one whose wool will make a bunch of money. And sure God says

have no other God's but lets not be fanatics here. Everyone goes to the pagan temple once in a while. It's fun. Do I need to list our pagan temples for you? I think that after 2½ years of hearing me rant about our temples, you have the idea.

So Malachi was talking to people just like us; people who get sloppy in their relationship with God all too easily, people who get distracted from what is important, people who don't necessarily set out to sin and suddenly find themselves filthy with sin from head to toe without even knowing exactly how we got there. BUT NEVER FEAR! THE LAUNDERER IS HERE!

Malachi promised that God would send a messenger to clean up his people. And who could endure that day? That messenger would be like a refiner's fire. He will intentionally heat things up for us because it is when things get hot that all the dirty stuff melts away and the pure faith that is in us begins to shine like gold. It is when we have to depend on

God to survive, look to God for life and breath, that we believe that God is the source of everything for us.

And that messenger would be like a launderer using launderer's soap. Soap is made with lye which is very caustic. It burns the skin and can kill you if swallowed. Launderer's soap is heavy on the lye because it is the lye that does the heavy cleaning. So this is not good news that the messenger from God will be washing us with caustic, lye soap...or is it?

John the Baptist came as God's messenger. He came to prepare the people for Jesus' arrival and he comes again to us today to prepare us for his return. And he brings with him a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. Pure LYE! You and I are soaking in LYE! But it is smart lye. It burns! Oh man does it burn, but it only burns the dirt, not the soul.

We don't like having our dirt loosened up and brought to the surface. How many of us are critical and caustic? Anyone who isn't doing something OUR WAY is wrong and

deserves to be demeaned. Anyone who is not quite where we are in faith yet deserves to be belittled and mocked. Anyone who disrupts our personal little club, that is really God's Church, deserves to be excluded and for heaven's sake, don't you dare disrupt my party plans with your petty needs and don't expect me to sacrifice what I **want** so that you can have what you **need** (whether that is physical, spiritual or emotional). All of that caustic behavior needs to be BURNED UP! EATEN AWAY! DESTROYED IN A BIG BATH OF LYE!

And then we will be prepared to meet the Lord. Are you feeling a little desperate? A little burdened? Well don't. Because Jesus did not leave us with John's Baptism. He took John's Baptism and reformatted it for our good. First he suffered all the heat for us. He took all of the punishment for all the things of which we repent. A Baptism of Fire conflagrated on a cross as the Son of God hung damned. Then he added the Holy Spirit to John's Baptism so that now the waters work on us in two directions.

John still accuses us. He still shows us the places in which we fail and demands that the children of God stop acting like whiney, selfish brats and start acting like the children of God. But the Holy Spirit burns INSIDE. That fire was lit the day he came to dwell in each of us and for most of us that was the day of our Baptism.

Each day, the Baptismal fire continues to burn. It heats up as we hear God's Word and receive his body and blood in the sacrament. And soon between the fire inside and the soap outside, what impurity can live anywhere near us? And we will be prepared to meet him when he comes.

The King Comes. As we await his arrival, his soap and his fire are doing their work and our love for him and for one another is abounding more and more and the fruit of righteousness is becoming more apparent all around us. Keep soaking! For our salvation is near – nearer perhaps than any of us thought. Come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen!