

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 25 (Proper 28)
Text: Malachi 4: 1-6
Theme: "But Everybody's Doing It!"

FOR BEHOLD! THE DAY IS COMING, BURNING LIKE AN OVEN, WHEN ALL THE ARROGANT AND ALL EVILDOERS WILL BE STUBBLE! THE DAY THAT IS COMING SHALL SET THEM ABLAZE...

When we were in Branson for vacation last summer, we watched glass blowers. The ovens used to heat the molten glass mixture are about 2,000 degrees. If you stuck your hand inside that oven it would take less than a minute to burn off every ounce of flesh from your hand – right down to the bone. What if we could watch people who sinned get thrown into those ovens? That would be a pretty effective deterrent to sinning – at least to intentional, outward sinning. I can imagine that the sin rate would drop off significantly. Smart off to your parents? Into the oven with you! Have a lustful thought about that magazine model while standing in line at Jewell? Into the oven with you. Skip the offering this week because you decided to take that trip to Dorr County instead? Into the oven with you.

Does it seem a little harsh to you? Well tough luck, because that's the way of God. Either you're wheat or you're chaff, holy or unholy and the unholy – the chaff goes into the

oven because that which is unholy can have nothing whatsoever to do with that which is holy. Amen.

What? You're not happy with the sermon ending like that? If you are, then you and I need to talk about your self-righteousness because if anyone here thinks he is holy, I will be happy to hold the mirror up for you to look into. If the sermon ended like that then we would all be damned.

Malachi was frustrated with his people. They thought money was more important than faithfulness to God. They did what was expedient instead of what was right and they kept their options open when it came to worship – why narrow yourself down to just one god when you can worship five or ten? Besides, by saying that there is only one god, we might offend people and they won't buy from us anymore. And by doing and saying what is right instead of what people want to hear, they might get mad at us and we wouldn't be popular.

So Malachi reminded them of what awaited people who live without the one true God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There are only two options for the afterlife and although people

have tried to create any number of other options over the years, even today, when you die, you either go to eternal life with God or eternal death with Satan. That's it.

The way you get eternal life with God is through grace. God was not satisfied with the sermon ending the way I ended it earlier. God is not satisfied with leaving it up to you – letting you figure it out the best you can. He never has been because he knows that left alone, we will always have greater confidence in our own intelligence than we ought to.

So he sent Moses with the Law. The Law gives us a mirror so that we can see exactly what God expects and exactly where we fail to measure up. He sent Elijah to call us to His word. He sent John the Baptist to point us to Jesus and he sent Jesus himself to pay for the Law that we break. See? Today is not gloom, doom and damnation. We don't have to worry about the sin we commit because Jesus has paid for it. We don't have to wonder if we have done enough good works because Jesus did them for us.

The work is completed. If Jesus burst through the doors this instant, we might be a little surprised, but none of us would be afraid. We're ready. Those who do not have faith in Christ? It will be terrible for them. It will be the most horrible realization they ever face – that their intelligence and money and good looks get them exactly nothing but hell. Someone should tell them.

Someone should tell them that the waters of Baptism flow in this place every week, washing us clean of all sin and empowering us to live lives without fear, anger and bitterness. Someone should tell them about the banquet that we eat here every week – a banquet that mirrors the eternal banquet in heaven – a banquet of the very body and blood of Jesus so that when you and I walk out of here and into the cold and heartless world we carry Jesus not just with us, but IN US! Someone should tell them.

We have a little foyer at my house. It is not a very nice place. It's always muddy from kids and dogs tracking in. It's always cluttered with shoes and coats and backpacks and mail that get dropped there. It's small and cramped and dark. Earth

is the foyer for our lives. It is not the main house. We get all bent out of shape over nonsense when all we take out of this life is our relationships with each other and our relationship with God. Nothing we acquire matters. It just gets left in the foyer. Any achievement is only noteworthy if it helps us serve God. Don't be like Peter, trying to build houses on the Mount of Transfiguration and stay forever. Why would you want to live in the foyer? By our Baptisms, we are now dwellers in the house of the Lord. We're just waiting for the rest of the house to open up. AMEN.