



Lent 2025

How to live faithfully

With help from the twelve minor prophets

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Repent and Renew.....	3
Remain Faithful	9
Do Justice with Mercy.....	15
Speak Truth.....	21
Worship The Lord in Righteousness	26

Introduction

The Hebrew Bible (most of the texts that Christians call the Old Testament) is traditionally divided into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Prophets are further divided into Major and Minor, not on account of any difference in importance, but simply because of length. Indeed, the Prophets called 'Minor' are sometimes referred to as 'the Book of the Twelve' for the simple reason that their respective books can all be written onto a single scroll – where the 'Major' Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) each need a scroll to themselves.

Apart from forming this collection, the prophecies are largely independent of each other, and (although difficult to date with certainty) appear to have been delivered across a timespan of several centuries, beginning in about the eighth century BC. They may all be characterised as exercises in 'speaking truth to power' and therefore there are a number of themes that can be drawn from them.

Over five sessions in this Lent course we will read excerpts from two of the twelve each week, matched with short readings from Christian theologians, and with relevant artistic contributions selected to provoke thought and discussion.

As we have done in previous years, visual and musical elements are indicated by links to online resources (to avoid breaching any copyrights in reproduction), while texts and some suggested questions to begin discussion are included in this booklet. There is an abundance of material here, and we encourage you to use these materials in a way that works for your group. We hope and pray this study provides food for thought far beyond both the sessions and even Lent itself!

Repent and Renew

Background on Joel

Joel is one of the hardest prophets to put in context: some scholars suggest an early (pre-exilic) date on the basis of his use of language, while others believe that he directly alludes to other texts, which could put him as late as the fourth century BC. He begins with an extended metaphor comparing a plague of locusts to invading armies, before turning to the 'Day of the Lord'; our excerpt is a call to avert disaster.

Read Joel 2.12-32

Joel 2.12-14

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain-offering and a drink-offering for the Lord, your God?

Discussion Questions

- In the light of our tendency to be distracted and selfish, how can we comprehend the consistency of God's love?
- Joel calls his hearers to 'rend your hearts and not your clothing'; in what ways do we perform contrition outwardly? And how do we recognise true inner repentance (in ourselves and in others) and distinguish it from merely outward appearances?

Background on Hosea

Hosea is likely to be one of the earliest of the twelve minor prophets, active in the eight century BC, when the kingdom of Israel was under attack (the kingdom would fall to Assyria c.720 BC). Much of the book describes the relationship between God and Israel as like that between a husband and an unfaithful wife. The final chapter suggests that repentance may still lead to blessing.

Read Hosea 14

Hosea 14.1-7

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Take words with you and return to the Lord;

say to him, 'Take away all guilt;

accept that which is good, and we will offer the fruit of our lips.

Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses;

we will say no more, "Our God", to the work of our hands.

In you the orphan finds mercy.'

I will heal their disloyalty; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.

I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall strike root like the forests of Lebanon.

His shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like that of Lebanon.

They shall again live beneath my shadow, they shall flourish as a garden;

they shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

Discussion Questions

- Hosea's vision is of God being the healer of His people's disloyalty. When we repent, is it on our own initiative or is it an action of God in us?
- Are we actually as bad as all that? What sort of things do we have in mind when talking about repentance?
- Structural sin is the idea that we participate in broken structures, without necessarily being ourselves bad actors; to what extent do we need to repent of things that are beyond our individual control?

Further Discussion...

Theology/Literature

From Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*

Why does the call to repentance include the oppressed (in addition to the oppressors who are incomparably greater transgressors)? Why the talk of their sin and forgiveness? Because little “Jihads” along with their mothers and fathers need not only material and psychological help but release from the understandable but nonetheless inhumane hatred in which their hearts are held captive. Put more generally and more theologically, victims need to repent because social change that corresponds to the vision of God’s reign— God’s new world— cannot take place without a change of their heart and behaviour. Granted, many a false prophet used the message of repentance to stabilize the order of oppression: “the religion of the sinful soul” served to divert attention from “the economics of dirty deals” and “politics of ruthless power.” We would be unwise, however, to let this outrageous misuse blind us to the extraordinary social significance of the victim’s repentance. If it did, in our own way we would be guilty of the same sin the false prophets are guilty of— we would perpetuate the old order of oppression while self-righteously declaring ourselves the vanguard of the new order of liberty.

Questions:

- Volf suggests that victims as well as perpetrators need to repent. What change is required from a person who has been wronged?
- How does Volf’s stance on victims and forgiveness differ from blaming victims?

Art

1. The Penitent Magdalen, Nicolas Régnier (c.1590-1667)
<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-penitent-magdalen-33197>

Question: Mary Magdalen, since her identification with the woman in Luke 7.36-50 by Gregory I, is often portrayed as tearful (hence the English word 'maudlin'). Does repentance always imply misery?

2. The Penitent Man - Fractal Art, Nirvana Blues
<https://fineartamerica.com/featured/the-penitent-man--fractal-art-nirvanablues-.html?product=tapestry>

Question: What does the Penitent Man tapestry have to do with its title? Do we see violence? Fire? Dirt? Messiness? – or light? Movement? Freedom?

Music

1. J. S. Bach, *Ich Elender Mensch*, BWV48, first movement.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UmWg20DwRHs&list=PLh1uDoddgwSylfHWbdQJZ-YXHA71cMr2W>

Text: Ich elender Mensch, wer wird mich erlösen vom Leibe dieses Todes?

Translated as: Wretched man that I am, who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7.24)

Question: Bach's text from Romans comes from St Paul's discussion of 'doing the very thing I hate'; how do we hold together our own weaknesses with our convictions?

2. Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, *Fresh Start*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyDbCr5hHPM>

Lyrics: Sometimes I feel like
I've been here before

It's like the past knocking on
my door

Sometimes I feel like I'm
standing still

Or better yet I'm running up
a hill

Sometimes I feel like I need
a crutch

Sometimes I feel like it's all
too much

Sometimes I wonder what
are we here for

And if I wanna do it anymore

I need a fresh start, let's go
back to the top

Rewind the tape and reset
the clock

This time, there's no turning
back

So you say you're not
satisfied

And you want a bigger piece
of pie

Take my advice, don't
hesitate

Before you know it it'll be too
late

Don't wanna hear that you're
feeling old

Time to talk, you better
search your soul

There's still time for one
more dance

We may never get another
chance

Question: The song *Fresh Start*, especially in the context of its 'official' video, is about activism rather than merely a change of mind. What does repentance require us to do?

Remain Faithful

Background on Nahum

Nahum writes about the downfall of the Assyrian city Nineveh, suggesting a context in the latter part of the Seventh Century BC. In the last stanza of this excerpt he writes that the fall of Assyria will enable Judah to continue in faithfulness: to celebrate religious festivals, and to fulfil vows.

Read Nahum 1

Nahum 1.12-15

Thus says the Lord,

'Though they are at full strength and many, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more.

And now I will break off his yoke from you and snap the bonds that bind you.'

The Lord has commanded concerning you: 'Your name shall be perpetuated no longer; from the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the cast image.

I will make your grave, for you are worthless.'

Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!

Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off.

Discussion Questions

- Nahum links fulfilment of vows to the celebration of festivals: do we need religious celebration to be faithful to our words?

Background on Obadiah

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Hebrew Bible, being a single chapter of only 21 verses. It is a rebuke to the people of Edom, neighbours of Judah and by tradition kin to the Israelites as descendants of Esau, for failing to stand in solidarity with Judah while it is under attack from a foreign power (probably Babylon, thus in the Sixth Century BC)

Read Obadiah

Obadiah 10-14

For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off for ever. On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them. But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune; you should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin; you should not have boasted on the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity; you should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity; you should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity. You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives; you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress.

Discussion Questions

- Obadiah rebukes Edom for not standing with Judah as kin: how important is it to be loyal to family and/or friends? Does this ever conflict with wider loyalties – to truth and justice?
- Does being faithful mean one can never change one's mind in any way?
- What are the obstacles to our faithfulness, both in our own characters and in the world around us?
- Which is more important: that we are faithful to God, or that God is faithful to us?

Further Discussion...

Theology/Literature

From John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*

Now our difficulty lies in getting beyond this half knowledge of Christianity, if we make history our teacher; in obtaining from it views serviceable, ready, for belief and practice, whole views, definite answers to definite questions, critical decisions between truth and error, explanations of its own variations, measures of its meaning. History is not a creed or a catechism; it gives lessons rather than rules; it does not bring out clearly upon the canvas the details which were familiar to the ten thousand minds of whose combined movements and fortunes it treats. Such is it from its very nature; nor can the defect every fully be remedied.

Question: Newman is concerned that changes in Christian Doctrine over time might mean that what we believe as Christians could cease to be the true teaching of Christianity. How can we discern truth in such circumstances?

Art

1. Abraham and Isaac, Alissa Kim Tjen
<https://www.saatchiart.com/en-gb/print/Painting-Abraham-and-Isaac/725789/2802104/view>

Question: Abraham's willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice is commended as an act of faith (Hebrews 11:17-19); does Alissa Kim Tjen's image reflect that?

2. The Master of the Sea, Faith Teel
<https://faithpaintings.com/blogs/news/painting-jesus-calming-the-storm>

Question: In the stilling of the storm Jesus rebukes the disciples for lacking faith (Matt 8.26) before rebuking the wind and the sea. How can we, in faith, achieve the serenity that Jesus enables – and as depicted by Faith Teel – while the storm still rages?

Music

1. Olivier Messiaen, *Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus*, from *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Od5cGDOKXfk>

Composer's note: *Jesus is here considered as one with the Word. A long phrase, infinitely slow, by the cello expatiates with love and reverence on the everlastingness of the Word, mighty and dulcet, "which the years can in no way exhaust." Majestically the melody unfolds itself at a distance both intimate and awesome. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."*

Question: The *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (Quartet for the End of Time) was completed and first performed by prisoners of war, in a camp in Silesia in 1941. In those circumstances, how might a meditation on the eternal faithfulness of Jesus have been possible?

2. The Killers, Be still.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Tk4hFSxhw0

Lyrics: Be still
And go on to bed
Nobody knows what lies
ahead
And life is short to say the
least
We're in the belly of the
beast

Be still
Wild and young
Long may your innocence
reign
Like shells on the shore
And may your limits be
unknown
And may your efforts be your
own
If you ever feel you can't
take it anymore

Don't break character
You've got a lot of heart
Is this real or just a dream?
Rise up like the sun, labour
'til the work is done

Be still
One day you'll leave
fearlessness on your sleeve
When you've come back, tell
me what did you see
What did you see?
Was there something out
there for me?

Be still
Close your eyes
Soon enough you'll be on
your own
Steady and straight
And if they drag you through
the mud
It doesn't change what's in
your blood
(Over rock, over chain, over
trap, over plain)
When they knock you down

Over rock and chain
Over sunset plain
Over trap and snare
When you're in too deep
In your wildest dream
In your made up scheme
When they knock you down

Question: The Killers link character with labour; are we primarily to *be* faithful, or to *do* faithfulness?

Do Justice with Mercy

Background on Amos

An Eight-Century prophet, apparently from Judah but prophesying in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Amos is very concerned that the poor are overlooked by the powerful, and that expressions of piety are hypocritical when not matched with acts of justice.

Read Amos 5.10-24

Amos 5.10-15, 21-24

They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth.

Therefore, because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain,
you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them;

you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.

For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins —

you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate.

Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time.

Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said.

Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate;
it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.

Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

Discussion Questions

- Is mercy commensurate with justice? How might the two ideas conflict, and in what ways might that apparent conflict be resolved?
- Amos speaks of those who 'hate the one who reproves in the gate' [public legal assembly]; how valid is it to resent being reprimanded?

Background on Micah

Micah was roughly contemporary with Amos, but spoke out in Jerusalem, making similar points to the Southern Kingdom of Judah to those Amos made in the North. He states directly that doing good is more important than ritual observance.

Read Micah 6

Micah 6.6-8

'With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Discussion Questions

- Are Justice and Kindness, as required by Micah, specific enough to provide guidance as to what we should actually do in any given situation?
- Both prophets appear to contrast justice and righteousness with observations of religious ritual and sacrifice. What is the relationship between what we as Christians do in church and how we act in the wider world?
- Is it possible for a human being (as opposed to God) to be both good and powerful? Is it possible for a human being without secular power to dispense justice?

Further Discussion...

Theology/Literature

From Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, 'Human Dignity and Human Justice: Thinking with Calvin About the Imago Dei'

Preoccupied with securing their independent selves, with guaranteeing those conditions indispensable to the sovereign deployment of their spiritual and physical property, rights-bearing subjects are enfolded in a project of self-vindication which is pre-eminently religious, but also social and political. They are enmeshed in calculative and mistrustful, quasi-judicial relationships with other persons and with the divine other, whom they encounter everywhere as unrelenting demand, as alien and unforgiving measure of their own insufficiency. Self-constructed in God's image, they too are centres of moral and political demand, and of private and public judgement on their neighbour's compliance, seeking to impose their righteous will through the instrumentality of governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, and the popular media, which act together as catalysts of a progressive juridicalising of human community.

Question: Joan O'Donovan critiques the subjective assertion of rights as being 'self-constructed in God's image'. How do we allow God's creation of us in God's image to differ from an attempt to assert ourselves as divine?

Art

1. The Last Judgement, Nathaniel Mokgosi
<https://artandtheology.org/tag/african-christian-art/>

Question: We tend to think of justice as good but judgment as bad, despite the two having the same root meaning. Does

Mokgosi's *The Last Judgment* reflect the good of justice or the terror of judgment, or both, or neither?

2. Justice Tempered with mercy, Emil Bisttram

<https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/justice-tempered-mercy-mural-study-roswell-new-mexico-courthouse-2129>

Question: In Bisttram's mural, which elements represent justice and which mercy? How are justice and mercy to be enacted within the scene?

Music

1. Luigi Nono, *Intolleranza*, final chorus.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOGJzJIbqbQ>

(Link is to the whole movement. Skip to 1:05:09)

Text: Voi che sarete emersi dai gorgi dove fummo travolti pensate anche ai tempi bui cui voi siete scampati. Andammo noi, più spesso cambiando paese che scarpe, attraverso guerre di classe, disperati quando solo ingiustizia c'era. Voi, quando sarà venuta l'ora che all'uomo un aiuto sia l'uomo pensate a noi con indulgenza.

Translated as: You who have emerged from the whirlpools where we were overwhelmed think also of the dark times from which you have escaped. We went, more often changing country than shoes, through class wars, desperate when only injustice was there. You, when the time has come that man is a helper think of us with indulgence. (Based on Bertold Brecht, *An die Nachgeborenen*.)

Question: Does Nono's music express the darkness in which his protagonists dwell, or the hope for future people that are addressed by the text?

2. Julian Lennon, *Disconnected*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJeP9B3QDEc>

Lyrics: You're looking
forward but you cannot see
Your life is blinded by the
powers that be
You're feeling trapped you
just want to break free
Oh God relieve us give us
sanctuary

Sometimes you see it in the
simplest of things
A homeless man can be the
wisest of kings
Love is the answer we've all
heard it before
Living and breathing it
means so much more
Oh life is deeper than the
sea
Oh close your eyes and learn
to breathe
Cradle life and love and let it
flow

Cos' I believe that
everyone's the same
Cos' we're all so
disconnected
But I have realised every
moment there's a sign

Hidden in the rhythm of the
mind
That guides us all to where
we ought to be

Time and illusion finds us
drowning in doubt
But if you listen you will find
a way out
Learn how to trust your
intuition and see
Your shadows float away and
set you free

Life deals you questions that
you've answered before
But have you learnt enough
to balance the score
Life's fragile moments make
us question our fate
Don't wait forever you might
be too late

Save our souls.... And Cry...

Oh life is singing in the rain
Oh open up your heart again
Cradle life and love
Cradle life and love and let it
flow

Question: Julian Lennon sings 'sometimes you see it in the simplest of things'. In what things have we seen it recently?

Speak Truth

Background on Zechariah

Zechariah is dated around the end of the Babylonian Exile and much of the book concerns the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple. There is therefore a celebratory tone, though in chapters 7 and 8 he turns to the quality of life God expects for his restored people.

Read Zechariah 8

Zechariah 8.16-19

These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgements that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, says the Lord.

The word of the Lord of hosts came to me, saying: Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace.

Discussion Questions

- What are the barriers we feel to speaking truthfully? What additional barriers do those with public roles face in speaking out?
- Zechariah links speaking truth to a future in which fasting is not necessary. How does truth telling forge a better world?

Background on Malachi

Malachi appears to have been written after the rebuilding on the Temple, and expresses disappointment that despite the restoration of the cultic worship, the Priesthood was not being honest.

Read Malachi 2

Malachi 2.4-9

Know, then, that I have sent this command to you, so that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the Lord of hosts. My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being, which I gave him; this called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in integrity and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts, and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in your instruction.

Discussion Questions

- Malachi's condemnation is specifically of a Levitical priesthood which he sees has corrupted its teaching. Are teachers (of various kinds) under more pressure to be truthful, or is there an equal duty on everybody? When is it appropriate to simplify an idea in order to communicate it well, and when does doing so risk undermining the truth that might be found in complexity?
- Are there truths which it is kinder not to speak?

- Is 'I don't know' often the most truthful answer to any question? If so, how can we ever communicate or develop and discern better answers?

Further Discussion...

Theology/Literature

From Sarah Coakley, 'How my Mind has Changed'

When one came at that history [of doctrinal development in the early Church and beyond] without the forced modern distinction between 'spiritual' and 'dogmatic' texts, a whole new world lay before one: spiritual growth and doctrinal truth hung newly together. The history of doctrine became likewise the entangled history of spiritual and political struggle – including intense struggles over questions of gender and authority. But this did not reduce doctrinal questions to (secularized) issues of sex and power – as was becoming a fashionable mode of analysis in the wake of Foucault. On the contrary, the commitment to prayer strung one on the rack of the painful internalization of divine truth. For me, this change of approach heralded no nostalgic or romantic return to a pre-modern era, as was – at the other end of the spectrum from the Foucauldians - also becoming popular in various forms of neo-conservatism. Here the slogan was: 'Down with the Enlightenment and back to the Fathers and medievals!' No, for me it was a retrieval of classic tradition sweated painfully out of the exigencies of a prayer encountered primarily as darkness and disturbance.

Question: Sarah Coakley writes about 'the rack of the painful internalization of divine truth'. Is the truth always painful? Or always liberating?

Art

1. Truth and fiction, Ces McCully

<https://rhodescontemporaryart.com/news/408-ces-mccully-truth-and-fiction-ces-mccully-s-debut-solo-exhibition-mary-me/>

Question: McCully's painting juxtaposes organic and cultural symbols. Are truths natural or cultural, and how can cultural understandings be evaluated?

2. What is truth? Christ and Pilate, Nikolai Nikolaevich Ge

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:What_is_truth.jpg

Question: Jesus gives no verbal answer to Pilate's famous question 'what is truth?' How does Ge's painting explore this?

Music

1. Thomas Tallis, *Loquebantur variis linguis*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I04PTVOsmRI>

Text: Loquebantur variis linguis Apostoli magnalia Dei, prout Spiritus Sanctus dabat eloqui illis, alleluia. Repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto, et coeperunt loqui. Gloria Patri...

Translated as: The Apostles spoke in many languages of the great works of God, as the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of speech, alleluia. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak. Glory be to the Father...

Question: Tallis illustrates the various tongues of Pentecost with polyphony. How do we navigate plurality in our search for what is true?

2. Green Day, *Troubled Times*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cVJr3eQfXc>

Lyrics: What good is love
and peace on Earth
When it's exclusive?
Where's the truth in the
written word
If no one reads it?

A new day dawning
Comes without warning
So don't think twice
We live in troubled times

What part of history we've
learned
When it's repeated?
Some things, we'll never
overcome

If we don't seek it

The world stops turning
Paradise burning
So don't think twice

We run for cover
Like a skyscraper's falling
down
And then I wonder
Like a troubled mind

What good is love and peace
on Earth
When it's exclusive?
Where's the truth in the
written word
If no one reads it?

Question: Green Day ask 'Where's the truth in the written word if no one reads it?' Do we address issues not only of what is correct and incorrect, but also of where we direct our attention?

Worship The Lord in Righteousness

Background on Malachi

As we saw last week, Malachi was concerned that the priesthood of the restored temple was corrupt. In this excerpt, however, he affirms that God has the power to purify that priesthood, and therefore to make the worship of the Temple once more acceptable.

Read Malachi 3

Malachi 3.2-4

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; 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. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

Discussion Questions

- Several of the prophetic texts we have read throughout this course reflect on the difference between worshipping God in formal ways and doing good in the world. Why do we feel drawn to worship God at all, rather than merely trying to live good lives?
- Malachi sees God as the one to act in purifying the priesthood, rather than their own active conversion. How does our reliance on God's actions interact with our own attempts to do good things?

Background on Haggai

Haggai pre-dates Malachi, as the Temple is still in the process of being rebuilt; indeed his message is largely that the rebuilding must be completed promptly. He has, however, a great vision for what the restored Temple will be like.

Read Haggai 2

Haggai 2.1-9

In the second year of King Darius, in the seventh month, on the twenty-first day of the month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai, saying: Speak now to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, and say, Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Is it not in your sight as nothing? Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the Lord; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work, for I am with you, says the Lord of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the Lord of hosts.

Discussion Questions

- Haggai's vision of the temple is one of splendour. Do we need this? Is simplicity not equally conducive to worship? Why does the prophet link worship with prosperity?
- Do we need to be good people first in order to come to worship God, or is the worship of God part of what enables us to be good people?
- The first part of our regular eucharistic service includes a confession and absolution: how seriously do we think about what we need to be released from as part of our preparation for worship?

Further Discussion...

Theology/Literature

From Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: on the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*

The complexities and displacements of a theology of the Eucharist, based on a reading of the mediaeval Roman Rite, are not situated within a gesture which seeks to evade either a loss or a positivity. Rather, its recommencements, invocations, permeations and significations are situated within a construal of language as that which both signifies and provokes a beneficent mystery which is not wholly other from the sign, although it cannot be exhausted by the sign. Instead, the theological sign *includes* and *repeats* the mystery it receives and to which it is offered, and as such, it reveals the nature of that divine mystery as gift, relationality, and perpetuity. Such a sign is not a terminal product which stops at its own signification. Instead, its signification is a redemptive sacrifice which is offered in the hope of further offerings, offered *to* and *as* the gift of repetition. This sign disseminates the tradition into which it is born, for it is configured as a history, a ritual, a liturgy, a narrative, a desire, and a community. Such a wealth of signification bespeaks the sign which is also a person, and a people, a body which is dispersed through time as gift, peace, and the possibility of a future.

Question: Catherine Pickstock writes about 'a redemptive sacrifice which is offered in the hope of further offerings, offered *to* and *as* the gift of repetition.' Is Christian Liturgy a straitjacket or an enabler of worship?

Art

1. Symphony of Praise, Yongsung Kim
<https://havenlight.com/products/symphony-of-praise-by-yongsung-kim>

Question: Yongsung Kim illustrates the praise of the whole created order: do we need church in order to worship?

2. Communion of Saints, Elise Ritter <https://elise-ritter.pixels.com/featured/communion-of-saints-elise-ritter.html>

Question: Christian worship has an eschatological dimension: that is, an orientation towards the final consummation of creation when God will be all in all. How does Elise Ritter's painting entitled 'Communion of Saints' reflect that concept?

Music

1. G. F. Handel, 'And he shall purify', *Messiah*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DdyoDp0fyY

Text: And he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Question: Does Handel's celebration of the purification of the temple priesthood overlook the pain implied by the prophet whose words he is setting?

2. Bob Marley, *One Love*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdB-8eLEW8g>

Lyrics: One love, One heart
Let's get together and feel all
right
Hear the children crying
Sayin' give thanks and praise
to the Lord and I will feel all
right.

Let them all pass all their
dirty remarks
There is one question I'd
really love to ask
Is there a place for the
hopeless sinner
Who has hurt all mankind
just to save his own?
Believe me

As it was in the beginning
So shall it be in the end

Give thanks and praise to
the Lord
and I will feel all right

One more thing
Let's get together to fight
this Holy Armageddon
So when the Man comes
there will be no no doom
Have pity on those whose
chances grove thinner
There ain't no hiding place
from the Father of Creation
Sayin'
One Love, One Heart Let's
get together and feel all right
I'm pleading to mankind
Oh Lord
Give thanks and praise to
the Lord and I will feel all
right

Question: Is it the primary purpose of giving 'thanks and praise to the Lord' that we should 'feel alright'?