

23rd Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 28 – Year C - The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony  
November 17, 2019 - Isaiah 65:17-25, Psalm 98, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13, Luke 21:5-19

As I suspect many of you know, the word Gospel is the English translation of a Greek word meaning Good News. Of course, all of Scripture, as the Word of God, is good news. But today's readings on the surface at least are a bit mixed.

Malachi, a name which means messenger in Hebrew, is dealing with a question that has troubled human kind from the beginning. Why do those who do not obey the commandments seem to prosper and those who do try to love God and love neighbor seem to face challenges. Like all of us, the questioner wants only to live in a world where goodness and not evil is dominant. The answer, harsh as it is to our ears is simply that in God's time the world will come right. In the coming day of the Lord evil will be destroyed and healing will come to the faithful. The message in this prophecy is that God has not forgotten the world he created or the people in it. Sometimes it is hard to see and even harder to understand, but faith calls us to trust that we are held in God's hand.

Next, we come to Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Church at Thessalonica. The message here is that those who don't work should not eat. There are explanations for why Paul might say this in this particular situation.

The Church and the apostles expected Jesus to return and the world as they knew it to end. They expected this to happen in the immediate future. Apparently, based on this belief many in Thessalonica had stopped working and providing for themselves. When their supplies ran out and the end had not come, they were hungry, depending on the generosity of the church to provide them with food. Paul's answer to the problem was that "anyone unwilling to work should not eat." This sounds harsh to our ears especially since one of the chief Christian ministries is feeding people. The instruction that Paul gives has the sting of judgement to it. Note that Paul does not say that those who cannot work should go hungry but that those who will not work should not eat. In a society where most had very little on which to sustain themselves, and few could afford to be idle, this only made sense.

It is perhaps the last sentence of the reading that bears some thought. "Brothers and sisters do not be weary of doing what is right."

But we do get weary sometimes very tired of hearing bad news. Like the news of yet another shooting in a high school in California, the 38<sup>th</sup> such occurrence this year alone. "Brothers and sisters do not be weary of doing what is right." It is hard sometimes to know what it right. Complex and unclear. There are people of good will and faith who disagree, sometimes passionately, about what it right.