

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, DEC 9, 2018

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Candle of Peace

Based on Malachi 3:1-4;
Baruch 5:1-2

"How long do we have to wait?"

It was a question being bantered over my head in the dentist's chair last week by the dentist and his assistant. "How long before we can put Christmas carols on the overhead speakers? When is it OK to decorate the office?" The assistant reminded me of a small child sitting at the base of a Christmas tree, eyes wide at all the carefully wrapped presents collected under the branches. "When can we open the presents, Mommy? How many more sleeps?"

But Christmas preparations bring in its wake, quite a mixed bag of emotions. There can be a quiet melancholy, which lingers also at the base of the Christmas tree. For some, there is an empty chair at the dinner table this Christmas, which is new, and difficult to deal with. For some, there are warm memories of family gathered and the noise and confusion of burnt gravy in the kitchen, that echo hollowly in your quite abode. For some, the traditions of the past have

changed; the family has grown, loved ones now living far away, or finances that do not allow for travel this year. For some, there were plans and dreams which have now been set aside, as time, and circumstances have changed, and new plans and new dreams have not quite yet taken shape.

"Take off the clothes you have worn in your mourning and distress, and put on the eternal splendour of God's glory." (Baruch 5:1)

"How long?" we might be quietly asking ourselves.

"How long before the grief lightens? How long before the quiet sadness dissipates, and the joy of Christmas emerges again? How long before the heaviness on my heart lifts like the angel's wings, and I can look with wonder at the baby boy in the stable? How long, Lord?" And while the expression "Keep calm and carry on," might sound good on the surface, it does little to lift the spirits of the inner soul.

Last Sunday, while the chosen people lived in exile, we heard

from the prophet Jeremiah. Away from home and land and family, the people cried out, "How long do we have to wait, Lord, until you send the One who will save us?" Years later, safely back at home, farming their land once again, back in the family fold, the same question appeared in Malachi, "How long Lord?" It would appear that the struggle to remain faithful had little to do with geography, and more to do with trust.

But perhaps the question is not, "How long?" but "Am I ready?"

Am I ready for the next turn in the road of life?

Am I ready for a new Christmas tradition, which might end up, just as much fun as the traditions I remember?

Am I ready for a change?
Am I ready for the Baby and for Bethlehem?

Malachi said to those who would listen: "Be prepared!"

"Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple... But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?"

(Mal 3:1-2)

Malachi continued, "When He comes, He will want His faithful to be ready and

waiting, eager for His presence, like a child eager for Christmas morning. He will expect us to be a chosen people, who are true to His word, familiar with the stories of old, disciplined in our efforts to be good examples, attuned and attentive to our prayers, reflections of God Himself!"

(stop to light blue candle on communion table)

Find the peace within.
Prepare.
"Keep calm, and trust God."
Amen.

Perhaps if our attention was turned away from the question of "How long?" and moved more towards "Am I ready?" may in fact, have found the missing ingredient of the 'sugar cookie' of life that is tasty, sweet, and filled with giggles as crumbs fall into our lap. Perhaps if we were to dedicate our thoughts towards being examples of our Saviour to our families and friends during our Christmas activities, we might find that some of our quiet melancholy has disappeared, and been replaced with smiles, laughter, a swing in your step, and an anticipation of what might happen tomorrow.

Then, not only would we have discovered the "Joy" of Christmas, we would have

"Take[n] off the clothes you have worn in your mourning and distress, and put on the eternal splendour of God's glory." (Baruch 5:1)

This morning, we lit the candles of "How long, Lord"
Now, we light the candle of "I'm getting ready, Lord!"