

December 9, 2012

Malachi 3: 1-4

¹Look! I'm sending my messenger on ahead to clear the way for me. Suddenly, out of the blue, the Leader you've been looking for will enter his Temple—yes, the Messenger of the Covenant, the one you've been waiting for. Look! He's on his way!" A Message from the mouth of GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies.

²But who will be able to stand up to that coming? Who can survive his appearance? He'll be like white-hot fire from the smelter's furnace. He'll be like the strongest lye soap at the laundry. ³He'll take his place as a refiner of silver, as a cleanser of dirty clothes. He'll scrub the Levite priests clean, refine them like gold and silver, until they're fit for GOD, fit to present offerings of righteousness. ⁴Then, and only then, will Judah and Jerusalem be fit and pleasing to GOD, as they used to be in the years long ago.

Luke 1: 68-79

⁶⁸Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; he came and set his people free.

⁶⁹He set the power of salvation in the center of our lives, and in the very house of David his servant, ⁷⁰Just as he promised long ago through the preaching of his holy prophets:

⁷¹Deliverance from our enemies and every hateful hand; ⁷²Mercy to our fathers, as he remembers to do what he said he'd do, ⁷³What he swore to our father Abraham — ⁷⁴a clean rescue from the enemy camp, So we can worship him without a care in the world, ⁷⁵made holy before him as long as we live. ⁷⁶And you, my child, "Prophet of the Highest," will go ahead of the Master to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷Present the offer of salvation to his people, the forgiveness of their sins. ⁷⁸Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God's Sunrise will break in upon us, ⁷⁹Shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, Then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – "Who's driving your spiritual pilot vehicle?"

When I was in South Africa I spent most of my time in the Eastern Cape Province working to convert the former Anglican Mission Stations into modern cooperative farms. But I took a week to fly to the Western Cape Province and the capital, Capetown.

One of the things I wanted to do was visit Boulder's Bay where African penguins nest and live.

To get there I had to travel on Chapman's Peak Drive – 9 km off the coastal highway running south of Capetown.

114 curves rising 593 m.

Sheer drops to the sea on one side – towering mountains on the other side.

Road regularly closed for falling rocks and dangerous winds.

=> my first serious experience with a pilot vehicle – proceeded at a crawl, winding our way around huge rocks in the middle of the road – hairpin turns with no barriers to protect you from falling – breathtaking scenery that you didn't dare look at for fear of driving off the edge of the earth!!

Pilot cars served to move cars safely through constantly changing road conditions.

Set limits on speed, number of cars on the road at any given time.

Pilot vehicle drivers at top and bottom of route in constant communication.

Their purpose => to get us to our destination safely, efficiently.

Where are we going this Advent? What is our destination? Are we able to get there on our own or do we need a spiritual pilot vehicle?

I think there is a perception among many Christians that believing is easy – automatic – a piece of cake!

My point of departure from this opinion is“

Although I believe we can, and often do, make God's love for us in Jesus way more complicated than it needs to be... still to believe in a deep meaningful, life-sustaining way in all the good days and crises, tragic days of our lives is NOT, I believe, a journey best taken alone any more than you should try to drive Chapman's Peak Road alone.

A pilot, a messenger, was exactly what the ancient people of God expected.

They heard the promise over and over again.

Today's reading from the prophet Malachi is a perfect example.

Malachi promised that God would send someone to clear the way – to help set humanity on a right/better course -> to get the faithful out of the mess they'd gotten into.

There was an understanding amongst the ancient people that God would send someone to guide humanity from the path of injustice, oppression and apathy (and all the obstacles along the way!) onto a smoother, clearer, safer road closer to God.

By the time the stories of Jesus were being compiled it became necessary for the church in the late 1st century to set the record straight.

Who was the messenger versus who was the destination?

In Zachariah's song he makes clear that his son John is not the Messiah but, rather, the messenger, the pilot vehicle, who will lead us safely to belief that Jesus is the Messiah. Those early Christians knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that their lives, their view of the world... their relationship with God had been utterly and completely transformed by Jesus.

They also wanted to make clear that it was John who kept them moving in the right direction -> who kept drawing them along the journey to see/hear/experience the miracle that was Jesus.

Who have your spiritual pilots been?

Who helped you come to the realization that your faith makes a difference in your life – that it defines the values that you live by – that it inspires your acts of justice, compassion and forgiveness.

Was it a parent? a friend? a neighbour? was it a famous person or someone unknown to the wider world?

Who led you from your fragile self-confidence along the perilous journey of life to a place of confidence and safety in trust in the love of God in Jesus?

Who do you have to thank for the faith that gives you strength and courage when you really feel exhausted yet life demands still more of you?

Who looks to you to lead them? to be their messenger? – to guide them to Christ?

We can and do change lives. It is sometimes a happy accident but, more often, like the safe passage of Chapman's Peak Road, it is thanks to a pilot who shows us the way.