

GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE
LAST SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

MAL 3:13-18
NOV 20, 2016

¹³ "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?' ¹⁵ And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.' "

¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ¹⁷ "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

I am going to start by talking about something
I don't know much about: investing in stocks
It is my understanding that you can invest in some stocks
that pay out a higher regular dividend than others.
Why would anyone want to invest in stock with low dividend?
Because the value of the investment itself
can grow faster when dividends are not siphoned off.
So you have to choose whether to focus on the short term
or the long term.
But we are not going to focus today on financial investments.
Instead, text cause us to think about how we invest our life.
Here too, you can focus on short term or long term.
Readings on this last Sunday of the church year
point us to Christ's return at the end of time
and encourage us to think of the long term.
and what makes all the difference in the long run.

THE WILL OF GOD MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO SOME
FAITH IN GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN US
THE GRACE OF GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR US

THE WILL OF GOD MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO SOME
¹³ "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of

walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.' "

Many here work in places where one or more people
don't do any more than they have to.
They may not show up ready to work
but are always ready to quit right on time or before.
They expect a reward for doing anything extra.
but still expect to have needs provided for
if they make mistakes or do a poor job.

Meanwhile, another, which may be you,
is expected to make sure everything gets done
and to keep working even if it seems to do no good.
and even to work longer to make up for the others
without getting anything extra for it.

Get the picture? It hardly seems fair.

So why does this second kind of person do it?

The first people may be called employees
while the second is called the owner.

Or the first may be students while the second is teacher
or the first are children, while the second is parent.

What makes the difference is their position.

Text gives conversation between God and those who say
it is not fair. The world is full of injustice.

Some are in position of evildoers
who don't care about what God says.

They do whatever they want and get away with it.

Not only that but they lie and cheat and mistreat others
and they get rich as a result.

Those who are arrogant seem to be blessed.

We can see examples of that too.

Others are in the position of God's people.

They try to do what God wants.

They walk about as if in mourning, that is, they repent
and are said when they fail to obey God.

But it is frustrating. What difference does it make!

Others who don't try to do right seem better off.

We tend to be pragmatists. We know how Christians should live
but how is that working for you?

Are you experiencing benefit or does it make no difference?

What good does it do to be kind, loving and generous
if others just take advantage of you?
What good does it do to work hard when the pay is low?
What good does it do to be qualified if there are no jobs?
What good does it do to study hard on things
that seem to be irrelevant?
But Malachi says the people who think they are doing right
are actually doing wrong as well.
because they are speaking against God
as if he doesn't know what he is doing.
So they too are saying they don't care about God's will
when it is different from what seems right to them.
It may be true that our doing right does not make a difference
in what happens, especially in the short term,
but...

FAITH IN GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN US

¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name.

A group of people is speaking with each other at class reunion.
One happens to mention how much he makes, a lot,
& pauses as if waiting to hear... and what do you make?
Others also speak up about what they make, but differently.
They make things like buildings, machinery,
useful products that everyone needs.
Others in the group work in nursing homes, child care,
schools, are volunteers or stay at home mothers.
One speaks up, "I'll tell you what I make.
I make a difference."

The point of this story is not to compare the importance
of one job with another
but that there are different reasons for why we do as we do.
Our reasons for doing what we do is not just
because of the benefits we receive or can see
but because we trust God for all we cannot see.
This includes not just blessings we have to wait for in future
but ways we benefit others in ways we may never see
in this life: bringing them to hope, peace or faith.

v. 18 says you will again see a difference between
the righteous and the wicked.

People should see a difference now,
Being people with faith in God may not make a difference
in what we have but should make a difference
in who we are and what we do.

In text a group of people speaks with each other.

They are identified as those who respect God.

We are not told what they say to each other.

but obviously they encourage each other to keep doing right.

Maybe they say: Remember how in the past the wicked
who prospered for a while finally got their due.

Or maybe: remember God is faithful to keep his promises.

Or maybe: remember how God has already given us
all we really need for life.

Or maybe: remember that we have also done bad things
and not done all we should but we also have escaped
because of God's gracious love and forgiveness.

Or maybe: think of all the fear, anxiety, guilt or shame
we don't have to live with when we trust God.

So why do those with faith do what they do?

It is not just because it really does make a difference
but because what makes all the difference in the world
is what God has already done for us.

THE GRACE OF GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR US

¹⁷ "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I
make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man
spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the
distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who
serves God and one who does not serve him.

Do you ever do anything you hope to never benefit from?

What about investing in insurance?

Especially life insurance. It doesn't pay until you die.

There is another benefit that comes when we die

but the difference is we are not the ones who pay for it.

It is God who has already done it.

God says the last day is coming when we will finally see
what God already sees all the time.

We will see the blessings that come through faith in him
that are worth more than life in this world can contain.

But especially we will see how great is his love and mercy
and how it is totally dependent
not on anything we deserve for what we have done
but on what Jesus has done for us.

God will spare us as a man spares his son who serves him
but it is because God did not spare his own son
but sent him to serve him
by doing all that we have failed to do.
because he is the parent and the owner.

The people of Israel put God to the test in the wilderness
and yet escaped because of Jesus who was tested
in the same way but was faithful and obedient.

During his life, most people didn't see the difference.

He didn't appear to be the holy Son of God.

He didn't appear prosperous or blessed.

When he died, it was an obvious injustice,
but instead of complaining he blessed others
because he knew what was happening in the end.

He was reigning in glory and gathering us into paradise.

This is what God's book of remembrance is about,
not all we have done but all he has done for us
and who he has done it for.

God has a long memory. He will remember us in the end.

This is why we need to remember what is written in his book,
the book written for us about all God has done.

& why he gives us Holy Communion in remembrance of him.

He has already made us part of his treasured possession
by making us his own dear children in Baptism.

On this last Sunday in the church year we are reminded
of how things end in the long run.

Often, in this life it may seem everything is unfair and is rigged -
until we win in the end. Then things look very different.

THE WILL OF GOD MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO SOME

& it seems to make no difference. They prosper anyway.

but complaining shows God's will doesn't matter to us.

FAITH IN GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN US

Trust in God, not just the benefits we can see

is what makes the difference in what we do

THE GRACE OF GOD MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR US

This is true now in ways we do not see, but in the end
we will see all the difference in the world.