

A prophecy fulfilled

Richard Greatrex reflects on Malachi 3:1-5

Malachi, the final book of the Old Testament in Christian Bibles, is used sparingly in the New Testament. Matthew, Mark and Luke quote verse 1 of chapter 3, equating the messenger preparing the way with John the Baptist, suggesting that the Lord suddenly coming to his Temple is Jesus. This is picked up by our lectionary compilers, who offer this passage for the infant Christ's ritual presentation by his parents in the Temple.

The context for Malachi is the first half of the fifth century BC, prior to the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah but after the exiles have returned to an impoverished homeland. Many have abandoned belief in God and are behaving as if the covenant is void. Consequently, verse 1 bristles with irony when talking about "the Lord whom you seek" and the "messenger of the covenant in whom you delight". The prophet hints that it will be a shock when the Lord does turn up to refine the people.

It is the babe presented by Mary and Joseph in the Temple who grows up to become that Lord, calling out hypocrisy, selfishness, unbelief and championing the needs of those who are oppressed, widows, orphans, alien or rejected. He becomes the divine refiner who, according to the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, never stops striving to drive every speck of impurity out of us, drawing us home into God's everlasting covenant. ☺



The prophet Malachi, St Lawrence Cathedral, Lugano, Switzerland

King of glory, batter down our stubbornness, insecurity and selfishness and fling wide the gates to our hearts, that we might be filled with your presence, sharing your compassion for the hidden and the hurting in this world. Amen.

Poet in lockdown

by Julia McGuinness

Julia McGuinness is poet-in-residence at Chester Cathedral. In this series she muses on the coronavirus lockdown.

"The body of the cathedral remains open," proclaims Chester Cathedral website. It's mid-March, days before lockdown shuts places of worship and just about everywhere else. Refectory, shop and cloisters are closed, Lady Chapel off-limits, the nave is chairless. A life-sized sculpture of the Last Supper has been installed

for Lent. Its surface is an imaginative mosaic of computer keyboard keys. It feels prophetic. Soon this is will be the defining thing that connects us with one another.

A handful of hushed visitors drift through. The cathedral feels eerie, a ship about to be abandoned. Something is being said goodbye to here.

The main doors are flung wide open. I have never felt such a breeze flow through this emptied space. It brings a strange freshness. Stale air lifts. Lit candles dip on their racks. I walk, watch and wonder.

Writing is essentially taking time to pay close attention and put down words for what you observe. The moment feels unique, a door opening to the unknown. ☺

Walking with Poppy

In our own time

by Gillian Cooper

As she gets older, Poppy becomes ever more unwilling to compromise on her morning walk. She has a terrier's innate stubbornness. If there is a smell of fox or squirrel, it must be investigated. If she spots a friend, we have to say hello. If she thinks she deserves a

reward for crossing the road, there is no budging her till she gets one. I have had to learn to take the walk at her pace. Trying to move her along is no good for either my temper or hers, and my breakfast just has to wait.

My difficult lesson in patience has made me think about how God sees humanity. How slow and stubborn we must seem, how unwilling throughout our history to pay attention to God's plan and move along, how reluctant to compromise. I am filled with gratitude that God makes allowances for the terrier in my heart, and treats me with infinite patience. ☺

“ God is the only one who can make the valley of trouble a door of hope.”

Catherine Marshall (1914-1983), American author