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*“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;  
he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.”*  
– Malachi 3:3

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Welcome to the season of Advent! What are some of your favorite Christmas memories? I still remember the cookies my grandmother used to make. Or the time we went to visit my mom’s family for the day and ended up snowed in for three days. Whether your memories are full of goodies or adventures, I hope they are full of love.

This second week of Advent, we are looking at the love of God. Our series, “A Look at Advent through the Old Testament” traces the promises of God through thousands of years of longing for a Redeemer. This week, our scripture comes from the prophet Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi was writing to the Jewish people after they had returned to the Promised Land from their years of exile in Babylon. Ezra and Nehemiah told the stories of how they made their way back and gradually rebuilt the temple and the wall of the city. But the country was a shadow of its former self. The people were languishing. They went through the motions of worship but had lost their passion for God. They offered the worst of their flocks instead of the most perfect lambs (Mal 1:13-14). The priests broke the covenant and caused people to stumble (Mal 2:8). God even says, “You have wearied the Lord with your words” (Mal 2:17), by calling good evil and evil good.

What does this rebuke have to do with love? Imagine a marriage where one spouse has basically given up on the relationship. They are half-hearted in all their conversations, they won’t help around the house, and they have broken their marriage vows with other people. In the immortal words of the Righteous Brothers, they have “lost that lovin’ feelin’.” And yet their faithful spouse still loves them deeply and wants to rebuild their relationship.

God in His infinite grace and patience refused to let this love die. He promises to send a “Messenger, who will prepare the way before me” (Mal 3:1), the “sun of righteousness ...with healing in his wings” (Mal 4:2). The coming Messiah would come with overwhelming love—not just a touchy-feely kind of love but a tough love, one that purifies us and makes us more like him. Imagine it purifying the marriage to cleanse away the bad stuff and rekindle passion.

As you prepare for worship this week, ask the Lord to reveal to you what has gotten in the way of your love for Him. Are there hurts or unforgiveness? Is busyness or hurry robbing you of peace? Are you giving God your whole heart or only the part that is left over at the end of the day? Ask Him to do the hard work of purifying your heart so you once again can be fully open to His love for you and transformed into His likeness. You are loved!

Blessings,  
Pastor Carolyn