

Malachi 4:1-6

See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

⁴ Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

Mark 9:2-14

² Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" ⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. ¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. ¹¹ Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹² He said to them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? ¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him."

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Malachi 4:1-6; Mark 9:2-14

Raising eschatological questions (A CONVERSATION)

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This message was presented as more “conversation” than as a manuscript. Consider the kinds of questions folks have about the end of their own life, or the end of something meaningful to them, the nation, a culture, a perspective, the planet. And then you can ponder the kinds of categories in which we ask those. They are the big - unanswered – questions, and yet it is those kind of questions that can drive our religious impulse. Enjoy!

Today – we are going to raise some eschatological questions.

You might be wondering, “Es-cat-a-WHAT-ical questions?”

Does anyone know what that word means – that hasn’t taken a seminary class before?

It means – the study of end times, last things. It’s wondering about the end of my life, the end of an era, the end of a nation, the end of the earth.

Today, I’m going to let you ask me those questions – as you wonder about them.

Personal: Comfort, Purpose, Judgment

Universal: Timetable, Signs

Categories of such questions:

Comfort Questions –

Will I be OK? – Dying, living through political unrest, climate change, whatever disaster is on people's minds and hearts. Will my family be OK without me?

What will people say about me after I'm gone? Regrets? Gratuities?

Purpose Questions –

Did I fulfill my calling? Live up to my potential? Did I do what God wanted from me?

Judgment Questions –

Who will be saved? Who will be damned? Heaven or hell? Is it what I do on earth? Is it how I believed?

Is the rapture something Presbyterians believe?

Individual judgment/National judgment

Timetable Questions–

Do we know the day or the hour? Prophecies fit in here – those who have “calculated” and usually re-calculated the end. Why do the scribes say Elijah must come first?

How does the coming of Elijah fit in if Jesus is already around, and why is Jesus talking about a resurrection and return?

Sign Questions –

Can it really be the Messiah has appeared if the world hasn't changed? Transformative behaviors are supposed to be a sign of a new dawning, of healing and hope. The parents' hearts are really tuned into their children, and the children to their parents. Lions and lambs lay peaceably together. Zionistic claims come to pass. (Connection between Malachi as a prophet, and Jesus as fulfilling prophecies)

Elijah and Moses – both had unusual circumstances around their deaths and being carted off into a chariot (Elijah) or that God buried him (Moses).

The confession that Jesus was the Messiah (8:29) in a world that clearly had not changed did not fit this scenario of transformation.

Prophecies are often about changes of heart/or destruction/or both

These are questions that inevitably lead to uncertain answers.

I can venture a guess – based on what I know.

I can speak from intuition.

I can dive into history and tell you how others have answered.

I can speak with the authority of the church.

And yet ultimately, I (even in my pastoral training) have to say that I don't know with certainty – any of these answers.

They are the mysteries of life (and death). They lead us to strive for what is important to us, and meaningful in the lives of others.