**[1]** December 8, 2024
Sermon Title: Speaking Peace
Scripture:  Malachi 3:1-4
Theme: The message of Malachi represents a vision of serious peace in an age of challenging darkness.

**[2]** The Hebrew word “Malachi” means “My Messenger.”  The background of Malachi is that God has called a messenger to speak to those who repeatedly raise ‘wearisome’ questions about God’s absence in stressful times. The message of Malachi represents a vision of serious hope in an age of challenging darkness. The author imagines an new offering presented in the new temple of Jerusalem, restored through the return of messenger-Elijah, that will be newly pleasing to the Lord, offered through the refined-and-purified-descendents of priest-Levi, an offering that will be presented in a ‘house of prayer for all the nations. (Mk. 11:17).’

**[3]** In Paul’s theology, this new offering smells of the aroma of Christ, a fragrance from life to life (2 Cor. 2:15-16; Phil 4:18; Eph. 5:2), a fragrance of ‘living in love’, a fragrance acceptable and pleasing to God. It will bear the smell of those who care for the homeless stranger, the widow, the orphan, the people in distress (James 1:27), those who care for workers exploited by the systemic greed of the marketplace. Those who trace their legacy back to priest-Levi through Jesus will be purified by the refiner’s fire of Christ and will present their gifts on behalf of the people, gifts that symbolize our just and equitable relationships with one another and with God.  A messenger of the covenant will ‘prepare the way’ for this pleasing fragrance. God will raise from among us a prophet who will be like Moses, a prophet who will speak peace to the nations, and be held accountable for that peace (Acts 7:34; Deut. 18:15-22).  Malachi predicts that this Godly messenger in whom we have placed our joy for so long a time, will come, not as a beautiful prince before whom we will curtsy, but as a refining fire before which no-one can endure to stand.  It is not the first time we have heard the question: Who indeed is qualified to speak peace in such a time as this?

**[4]** The prophet Isaiah also describes this messenger who will speak for those who know God’s name, “the feet of this messenger will announce peace and salvation to all the people,” and we who trace the steps of this messenger across the mountaintops and through the valleys will know the good news that ‘our God reigns’ today in the beauty and peace that will come on the day of its announcing (Is. 52:7; Rms. 10:15; Nahum 1:15). This messenger will publish peace to the nations. Instead of preparing the grave for the contemptible (Nah. 1:14), this messenger will prepare the lives for those who strive to live in peace.  Those who sow the soil with peace, will harvest the fruit of righteousness (James 3:18).  The minute we dare to speak our peace, or choose to hold our peace for the sake of others, we step into the hard work of adaptive challenge, understanding ourselves and our relationship to others.

**[5]** While attending Kansas Leadership Center in Wichita this past November, I had the very unique honor of being present for a program presented by the Wichita State University Global Dance Team. Students in this program travel the world to dance for peace and promote their programs. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is one of the finest programs that I have ever seen, to aspire to participate in, or to attend.  You cannot go wrong. It is just across the border in Kansas. Imagine with me if you can a large half-circular room. The dance team organizes itself around this room in strategic places.  Each of some twenty dancers finds someone in the audience to sit or stand beside so that the room is fully represented in the dance. The lead dancer stands in the center and front of the room leaning on a single chair, a special chair fully strong enough to hold her body in balance during the dance routine. All the dancers are athletes of the highest caliber, fit and trim and strong.  Now, that I have set the stage for your imaginations, I will introduce some details about the dance. The dance is entitled “Dear Me!” and is composed/designed by an extraordinarily-talented instructor named Shayla.” The dance begins at the front of the room with only one dancer balancing perfectly in different positions on the chair. Gradually, the other dancers are connected into the dance in rhythm with the lead dancer. When I say in rhythm, I mean that at times all the dancers are in harmony with the movements of the other dancers, at times they are in dissonance from the other dancers in their movements. As one who sits in the room watching the movements on either side of us and behind us and in front of us, I felt as if I were also participating in the dance. The dance became very personal, a series of healing movements that cannot be described in words. The lead dancer energized the other dancers and they in turn energized the lead dancer.  All the dancers together energized everyone in the room, and especially those who were sitting close beside one of the dancers.  The sound of their quick harmonic movements in the space surrounding us lends emphasis to the atmosphere of acceptance and grace. In terms of leadership, one person inspires others to lead and they, in turn, inspire the ones who have inspired, and so on, in a great chain of being.  There is passion and pain in the overall dance, symbolizing the struggles of life and how we, as potential leaders adapt ourselves to the dance space. The dance is an intervention in the lives of all who witness and experience it. Cultural intelligence and emotional intelligence evolve out of the shared dance space.  The dance has a certain dimension that is trauma-informed; the dance bears the heavy weight of the audience in its midst, to share the burdens of each wounded person together as a community. And, to cap it off, there is thematic music in the background of the dance. It is a song with soft lyrics to match the title of the dance, ‘Dear Me.’ The song has one line that repeats: ‘When are you going to love YOU as I do?’  In the background of the dance, we are being asked the question of self-love.  The image surrounding is a communal one, as each dancer puts their palm to the side of the face of those beside them, as if to say, when are you going to love yourself enough to take the crucial next steps toward leadership or

This is one of the many dances of peace performed around the world to bring the message of peace home to each person who experiences it.  Texas Christian University also has a Dance Team that travels the globe at special request to bring peace to areas where refugees struggle with daily trauma. Young people are bringing the message of peace to the world with their feet,with the healing rhythms of dance movements.

**[6]** In the Summer of 2019, you may have read an article in the TCU Magazine by Robyn Ross, entitled “Finding Peace Through Dance” The TCU Dance Team had visited Rwanda in January 2018 on a mission to heal and find healing. “By moving and dancing together and experiencing those potentially harmful body-felt sensations, they create a safe space where healing can begin,” Robyn wrote in her article.

“Dancing relieves your mind, takes away what you think and makes you laugh,” [Godelieve] Mukasarasi, [a social worker in the Rwandan village of Taba] said through an interpreter during a TCU campus visit in November 2018. “When we are singing or dancing, everyone has a part.”

**[7]** As we imagine how these dances of peace might surround even our own community, we can imagine the dance of the Holy Trinity that yields forth the Holy Infant, the Emmanuel, the incarnation of the Infinite God, in a tiny stable of peace.  The song of Zechariah records the spirit of the child who will ‘guide our feet into the way of peace (Lk. 1:79).’ Zechariah is the priestly-father of John the Baptist who offers the fragrant message of peace, the one sent to ‘prepare the way’ for peace.  Here in this tiny nameless and timeless place in the fields outside of Bethlehem, begins the love that extends beyond our community and state into the world.  In our Community Christmas Cantata later this morning, we will sing of the Prince of Peace who will soon be born, we will sing of the herald-messengers who sing of peace on earth and mercy mild, who will sing of God and sinners reconciled.  The poetic words of Paul will appeal to our better angels, that Christ Jesus is our peace, in his flesh bringing together those separated by conflict, breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between us, putting that hostility to death through the cross (Eph. 2:14-16).