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2 Advent C09 / December 6 / Malachi 3:1-4

Some of you parents and grandparents no doubt know from previous experiences that there are three words in our vocabulary which cause serious heart palpitations during the month of December ~ namely the three words, "Some Assembly Required."

These words are sneaky words, oft times hiding in the very lower corner of the bottom-side of a box containing a kitchen set, a Big Wheel rider, or child's workshop bench. All of a sudden, we grown-up adult people find ourselves on the floor engaged in fierce hand-to-hand combat with 4,176 little metal and plastic doohickey things which no one has ever come up with a name for.

The first thing we do, of course, is to spread out the 4,176 pieces across the floor to see just what it is that we're working with. And if we're really smart, we'll keep our thoughts about the relative who *bought* our child this gift ~ our *spouse's* relative ~ we'll keep all those thoughts neatly to ourselves. The second thing we do is look for the directions. This is very important. We have to follow directions. We have to understand what the creator intended for the toy to look like and how the creator intended for the toy to function if we are going to put the thing together as it was designed.

Fourteen hours later, the job is done. The 4,176 pieces which once lay scattered across the floor are all in their place (thanks to the miracle of duct tape) and once again we realize that the phrase "Some Assembly Required" is the grossest understatement of the entire Christmas season. The battle, however, is over! We stand back, admire what we have put together ~ and feel that we are now ready for Christmas.

But are we? Are we really? How often is our focus on and our Christmas preparations centered on all the different things that we need to do in order to assemble Christmas Day? How many of you feel like there is a radio announcer in your head saying, “Christmas is coming! Some assembly required.” Yet if the truth be told, the hope and the expectancy of the Advent season is not a hope and an expectancy that is limited to *hoping* that we’ve got everyone taken care of on our respective lists ~ and *expecting* that all of our children’s toys are going to arrive already intact. Advent points us towards a much deeper hope and a much greater expectancy ~ namely, a hope that *we* can be changed ~ and an expectation that God will do for *us* what we cannot possibly do for ourselves.

In essence, Christians cannot celebrate Christmas ~ Christians cannot celebrate the coming of the Christ child ~ without also celebrating *why* Jesus came ~ and *what* Jesus did when he got here. Jesus came to change us and he came to change the world. He came to make us new and to *reassemble* us as our Creator intended for us to originally be before sin caused one or more of our 4,176 parts to go missing. And honestly, which one of us doesn’t have a need to be re-assembled in some way? Which one among us is already completely put together as the fully-assembled Christians that God intends us to be?

Assuming that all of us would admit, in one way or another, that our lives need a little changing and re-arranging, where then shall we invite God to start, now that God is here? Is our faith and our coming to worship services a living and growing experience for us ~ an experience that we look forward to? Or has our worship become merely a habit and matter of custom? Do we live our Christian faith at home and at work ~ or do we separate our Sunday morning faith from what we do during the rest of the week? Are we doing our best to make Christ real to the people around us and do we have the moral imagination about how we can best love our

neighbors as ourselves? Can we love the neighbor who is far off and unfamiliar or can we only be moved to compassion by people near and dear? Does our Christian faith ask what we can do for God ~ or do we only care about what God can do for us?

As Paul so superbly wrote in Romans, we all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. In one way or another, each of us is like that infernal toy with the 4,176 pieces. We each have come into this world wrapped in boxes plainly labeled: “Some Assembly Required.” And as a result, each of us has some spiritual pieces missing ~ and we can only be re-assembled *if* we put ourselves back into the creative hands of our Creator.

The prophet Malachi said that God will do the assembly work that is still required, now that He is here. God is “is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.” And with honesty and humility, he asks: “Who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” That is, which one of us can appear in front of God as the perfectly adjusted Christian?

We are all still struggling to be purified and refined in God’s sight. But the good news is that God is patient with us and that He lets us come before Him just as we are. He will help us do the work that is necessary so that we joyful hearts and slightly re-assembled lives, we can be prepared for Jesus’ entrance into our lives anew during this Advent season.

Thus the first step that we can take is to recognize that the packages that we reside in all have the words, written in plain letters in plain sight, “Some Assembly Required.” That’s step one ~ recognizing and admitting that we are not altogether there. The second step is to create a list ~ either in our heads or on paper ~ of parts that we want and that we need specific help with. And then the third step is to present ourselves before God the Refiner ~ to present ourselves

before God the Purifier ~ and ask for forgiveness for where we have erred and ask for God's help so that we can be put together the way God would have us be. And once God has worked with us, we can almost picture Him standing back, admiring what He has put together ~ and then feel, in a new, different, and much better way that *now* we are ready for Christmas and all the days that follow. Amen.