**Homily for December 8 2024**  **Baruch 5:1-9 “On the Level”**

*Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.**Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting;**for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven.**For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."**Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

Well…it has been a wonderful but exhausting weekend thus far at Trinity! And I am not new to this ‘day-after-the bazaar’ reality…fifteen Bazaars and counting! So I *know* that, with everybody kinda overextended, that this sermon needs to be really interesting, or really short, and preferably both! Let’s get to it!

Today we hear the luscious poetic words of Baruch, the scribe and friend to none other than the famous prophet Jeremiah. Baruch was likely among the Jewish exiles who were deported to Babylon at the orders of Nebuchadnezzar about six centuries before Jesus came among us. And he does what biblical writers do – he tries to inspire the despondent crew around him. He is a better writer than Jeremiah, certainly, and borrows his style and sweeping panache from Isaiah, who lived about a hundred years earlier. His advice is this: *Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.* It’s time to wrap up the pity party, friends; time to get back to being God’s own people, despite our forced relocation. He expands this basic idea: *Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting;**for God will reveal your splendor everywhere under heaven, and will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."* And then, a few verses later*,* he extols the fairness, the justice, the equity of God as he echoes Isaiah’s more famous words about mountains and hills coming down, and valleys being filled up, that God’s people may walk on the level, safe and sanctified, and proclaims that *God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

You might be thinking, kind of a bad day for a history lesson, Pastor Dave. What on earth does any of this have to do with *us*? I’m here to tell ya, it could have *a lot* to do with us, depending on what we believe about today’s learning. Today’s new category – ready? - is *supersessionism.* If you aren’t familiar, that’s plenty okay, because we Methodists are kinda fuzzy about this aspect of Christianity. In its simplest form, *supersessionism* teaches that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s plan; the Church “supersedes” Israel. Its proponents teach that God has set aside Israel and made the Church the “new Israel,” the new and improved people of God. So if that is the case, then all of the rights, blessings, and perks of being the chosen people are ours. Yay! But also ours are the responsibilities, the mission, and possibly the punishments and curses bestowed upon our Jewish predecessors, these would be our inheritance as well.

Like I said, this category of ideas has been around in various forms since the third century, sometimes vilified and sometimes actively embraced. Martin Luther was quite a fan of supersessionism, insisting that the Jews had their chance, and not only did they not recognize the Messiah among them, but they also contributed materially to his being murdered. As a result, Israel’s place as the people of God was forfeited; this is officially known as punitive supersessionism. It is not uncommon to hear old - school Lutherans actually say that the replacement of Israel was a divine judgment on the nation for its rejection of the Messiah in the first century.

Now, if this all sounds pretty antisemitic, it’s only because it is. Progressive churches, in the main, welcome Judaism to the table of world religions, but this other undercurrent is always nosing about, in our liturgies and in our hymns and in our prayers, even in the names of our Bible components, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Judaism, as one can imagine, is rather opposed to this idea that they have been replaced, but that set of feelings is not theirs alone, right? Thinking Christians recognize this pattern somersaulting down the hills of history: The Christians claim to replace the Jews as the favored people of God, and then the Muslims claim to replace both the Jews *and* the Christians in that exalted role, and *then* the Mormons come along and claim that not only is the Christian faith the only one that matters, but that none of the Christians except them are authentic and chosen, and so it goes. And while we are all getting our knickers in a twist about who the *real* chosen people are, none of us are really taking that role seriously.

Here's the thing, friends: the chosen ones, whoever we are, have the primary mandate of being a light to the nations. A light! Not a bunch of squabbling conservative rednecks fighting with snobby liberals, tearing a country and a world economy apart…so, if we Christians take this theology to heart, we have to step it up and bring, not just heat, but *light* to the table. We have to mend the great schism of our self-absorbed denominational fortresses and become followers of Jesus again. And even though I said, scarce seconds ago, that none of us are taking the ‘light to the nations’ mandate seriously, I must auto-correct, because here at Trinity we have just shared our light in a wonderful way. The work of our hands, the fatigue of our bodies, the bleariness of sleep exchanged for arts and crafts time, the unity of our helpers and workers, all of these bring light in a world that thinks of Christian churches as a bunch of dysfunctional tribes. And we create this Bazaar for reasons that truly *are* bizarre by world standards: we exchange food and cloth and yarn and possessions for money, in order that we might give that money away! In the cooperation of our Bazaar, the world can see the level way, the unimpeded way, the godly way of doing and giving and serving and aching for the benefit of others. With Baruch, we have taken off the garments of sorrow and affliction, and put on the beauty of the glory from God. Robes of righteousness: not self-righteousness, but the kind of righteousness that benefits others, the kind that shares light here in Chico and beyond. And so I congratulate you, Trinity friends and families, because in this fragmented topography of the heart and spirit, we are walking on the level. Amen.