

Scripture and Sermon for Sunday, December 6, 2015

Baruch 5:1-9

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.

Luke 1:68-79

[Zechariah said:]

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on
his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth
of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy
promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued
from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear,
in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called
the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord
to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation

to his people by the forgiveness
of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high
will break upon us,
to give light to those
who sit in darkness and
in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Let us pray...Amen.

A few weeks before my spinal surgery, Leni and I headed out to Pratt's Falls in Manlius to see the falls and hike around a bit. The trails were wide, well-marked, and, because it was late Fall, nearly empty of hikers and walkers.

In following the path, we were rewarded with a stunning view of the falls, complete with the blazing orange, red and yellow leaves on the ground.

I loved it, I think she loved it, and we agreed that we should explore more waterfalls around our area when I was recovered.

On the day after my surgery, while shopping at Wegmans, Leni came upon a book called 'Hiking Waterfalls in New York'. She jokingly asked if she should get the book for me to read, and I, in all seriousness said yes!

In reading the book, I noted that there are a few water falls within a 40 minute drive of our house, and many more within a 2 hour drive. On Friday, after dropping Leni off at school, I drove to one of the nearest falls

noted in the book, a place called Carpenter Falls, on the south west side of Skaneateles Lake.

The falls are part of the Bear Swamp Creek, a medium sized creek that cuts through a Finger Lakes Land Trust Nature Preserve called the Bahar Nature Preserve. The creek empties into Skaneateles Lake, and the trail terminates on the western shore of the lake.

Both the book and the information kiosk at the trailhead mention that the trail to the falls is technically difficult, slippery, and very steep. That, and the fact that we had just had an inch and a half of rain the 2 days before seemed to promise a pretty good time!

I headed off to the falls, and found that in fact, the trail was everything it was advertised to be. But the view was worth the effort! After exploring around a bit, and snapping some photos, I headed back down the trail towards the lake.

The trail was muddy, the white blazes on the trees marking the trail seemed spotty to me, and after about 15 minutes of hiking, I realized that I had lost the trail. I couldn't see any white blazes ahead, or behind.

Now, hiking wisdom says that a hiker who loses the trail is supposed to back track until they find a blaze, or marking, and then proceed to the next blaze.

I didn't do that.

I found a path that seemed to lead down into the ravine; I could hear the roar of another set of falls, so I set off, climbing carefully down into the gorge, one sapling at a time.

The creek was running high, the roar was loud, and the falls were beautiful! There was a narrow path along with a flat shelf running along

the creek, and so I followed that figuring I would eventually come out at the lake. There were stunning mosses covering the rocks and roots along the gorge wall, there were honking geese up in the sky, it was quite an experience.

Except the walls of the ravine got steeper, the path along the creek got smaller, and the small flat shelf disappeared. I was kind of stuck.

I went over my options: go back up the creek, back up the ravine, find the blazes that marked the trail, and get reoriented, or I could climb the ravine wall, and hope that at some point I would cross the trail that led down to the lake. Either way, I was in for some climbing.

I chose to climb straight out of the ravine. A sapling here, a root there, a small shelf of slate to stand on...when I crested the rim of the gorge, I saw a white mark on a tree: I found the path again!

From there the path was pretty tame, meandering down to the lake. The peaceful lake. No rushing water, no steep or slippery slopes. I sat for quite a while just looking and listening. Grateful for having found the path.

Our gospel lesson this morning quotes Zechariah, telling us that the Christ Child is coming to 'guide our feet into the way of peace'.

Guide our feet.

When we lose our way on the path to peace, we have Jesus to guide our feet into the way of peace. But we have to move our feet if we wish to get there.

If I didn't actually climb out of the ravine, if all I did was pray for deliverance but didn't move my feet, I'd still be in that creek gorge.

Jesus came to guide our feet into the way of peace, but if we want peace to be a lasting part of our lives, we're going to have to climb out of the ravine one slippery step at a time. We know we can go back, along the narrow path by the cold and rushing waters, back to where we lost the path, or we can grit our teeth and climb out, letting our feet be guided by Jesus.

And when we crest the bluff, overlooking the gorge, we too will see the marked trail: a path to peace.

Now, hiking isn't for everyone. Hiking in December after heavy rains might not be your cup of tea. But metaphorically, we're all hiking on the slippery slope along a dwindling path. Metaphorically, we're all looking for Jesus to guide our feet into the way of peace.

This week, let's look inside ourselves to see where we need to move our feet along that path.

We can pray for deliverance, but we're going to have to climb out by moving our feet one slippery step at a time. Sometimes we'll slip, maybe fall, maybe get hurt in the process, but if we don't move, if we don't try, then we're stuck.

We're going to have to trust that Jesus will guide our feet in the way of peace, and we're going to have to start moving our feet. I believe it's ok to risk slipping and falling, to even risk injury, as long as we trust that Jesus will guide our feet. Let Jesus guide your feet. Amen.