



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH  
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

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Baruch 5:1-6

December 6, 2009

Second Sunday of Advent

## “Crowned with Glory”

It's an interesting reading this morning from Baruch. Since this book rarely comes up in the lectionary, I thought it would be interesting to wade in. It's a book only found in Latin and Hebrew versions of the First Testament, not the Greek. Baruch was believed to be Jeremiah's personal scribe, who stayed with him during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. It's unlikely he wrote this book however. Somebody, a few hundred years later, used his name. The Babylonian siege is used as a historical backdrop for its message. This section was written to encourage Jews, who were feeling “lower than a snake's belly” as my father used to say. They needed a boost.

In that sense, it's every bit as relevant 2300 years later. There is something in the human breast that defaults to feelings of worthlessness. It's my own experience that it doesn't take a barbarian hoard ransacking your city to cause this feeling. I suspect Tiger Woods is feeling a little besieged by the barbarian press this week. He's got to be feeling pretty low. We have a propensity to beat up on ourselves at the slightest provocation, let alone our more serious missteps. I don't know what it is exactly that predisposes us to

judge ourselves – and others - so harshly, but we do.

When I first became a Christian, I was told that I wasn't going to get anywhere until I confessed that I was worthless - that I had fallen short of the glory of God, and I needed to repent and ask Jesus into my life to change my status from condemned sinner to one of God's elect. The strange thing about this was how easily I went along with this diagnosis of my condition. This, despite the fact that I wasn't breaking into people's homes to pay for a drug habit, I wasn't a bully or a sex offender, and I wasn't stealing candy from children.

I was a successful athlete, a decent student, a good son, and if you had asked most of the people who knew me, they would have told you that I was a pretty good guy all things considered. But I pursued the task of uncovering my sins with breathtaking earnestness. I rounded up all the booze in the house – which wasn't much – and poured it down the sink. I apologized to Joe Cuero for beating him up in grade 5 when he bugged me about kissing Pamela Reid in the school play. The worst of my sins was that as a student I had been a waiter and lacking the requisite condiments

for my bachelor pad. I was told that rock and roll was bad so I ditched all my LP's. I still weep when I think of this. I returned the knives and forks that I had stolen from the Butcher Block and asked the manager to forgive me. He wasn't at all impressed by repentance project.

In order to explain our bad behavior, some theological models imagine an original Eden, a Paradise, in which Adam and Eve practiced compassionate communication with each other, gave each other enough space to grow as individuals, and turned off the TV during dinner. But once the "fall" happened, however you want to interpret that, it's been downhill ever since. Only a supernatural intervention by God could clean up the evil in the heart of the human. So along comes Jesus, who does for us on the cross what we couldn't do ourselves, and by believing he did it, we receive a new and improved version of ourselves.

Around Canadian Memorial we're operating out of a different theological model that is evolutionary in nature. There was no original paradise, I'm sorry to report. We evolved from bacteria like everything else, and therefore all the good that's ever happened on the planet and all the bad that has ever happened is built right into the fabric of our being. We have a tremendous capacity for ruthless competition, brutality, and violence and we have an equally fantastic potential for goodness and all manner of virtue.

Think of the worse atrocity that has ever happened in the human realm, and that capacity exists within you. Now imagine the highest and noblest example of what it means to be human, and that capacity exists within you and within me. This is not wild speculation or metaphysical mumbo jumbo. In evolutionary terms, we are composites of all that has ever happened on the planet earth, and in this cosmos going right back to the Big Bang. Whatever gave rise to Hitler and Hiroshima, or Auschwitz and Rwanda is within us. But there is also a Jesus of Nazareth and a Buddha and a Mother Theresa within us. Every valiant act of courage and self-sacrifice ever made exists within you. You get my point.

But we have not fallen from a primordial state of perfection into our current state. And therefore what we need is not another divine rescue mission, but to awake to our true nature. We find ourselves in an evolutionary stream of development, which is actually moving toward perfection or wholeness, not regressing. As Ken Wilber puts it, we have actually come "up from Eden". What this means is that after 13.7 billion years of evolution, we are the species with the capacity to select our preferred future. This is a stupendous, miraculous moment in the history of the universe, and in the context of deep time, it just happened yesterday. We can choose to act from our lower nature or we can choose to act from our higher nature. We have a crocodile brain, yes, but we are *not* our crocodile brain. I know a lot of woman might beg to differ in light of Tiger's most

recent transgressions. But Mr. Woods made choices, and that's the glory and that's the responsibility of the human being in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are not victims of fate or human nature or circumstance in any kind of absolute way. We are the choices we make. Evolution has come to a point at which it takes the form of self-conscious being – me and you - who know ourselves to be shapers of the future. This is new. It's just beginning to dawn on us as a species. We can hide from it, we can run from it, we can blame others for our fate, but when we do so we are avoiding the true dignity of the human condition.

Which brings us back to the passage from Baruch:

“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 (Baruch 5:1-3).

Yes, we know the garment of sorrow and affliction. It's hanging in our closet.

We are making dumb decisions as a species and as individuals. Our planet is heating up, for example, because we've been living out of alignment with earth's limits. Now the earth is giving us feedback in all kinds of ways. I'll be preaching about this next week. This is how evolution works. You try something. You get feedback. You make changes or you die. That's why we're launching this fast and vigil for

Courage in Copenhagen, right here at Canadian Memorial, this morning. We're part of the feedback system of the earth, trying to get a message through to our leaders that we're in serious trouble. But again, our leaders aren't bad. They aren't evil. The same is true of our manufacturers and corporations. And while they are not evil, if they don't listen to the feedback from the people and the planet, future generations will be wearing the garment of sorrow and affliction. In this theological model the problem with humans is foolishness, not innate sinfulness.

It's time to put on the “robe of righteousness” – not self-righteousness – but living in right relationship with Spirit, the earth, ourselves and each other. It's time to start functioning from our higher natures. We have a reptilian brain – yes – but we are not our reptilian brains. We need to go beyond the survival instinct to live in unity with our highest and deepest nature. The passage this morning tells those who are feeling terrible they need to receive a crown of glory from their God. To be crowned with the glory of the everlasting God is stop dancing with our survivalist ego structure that can only operate from fear, and to start doing the cha-cha with Spirit. This is the dance of realization or awakening – the dance of sacred wisdom.

We awaken to our essential connectedness with Spirit, with the planet, and with each other. We choose to simply and finally walk away from the dance of separateness, which

leads inevitably to sorrow and affliction. We're all in this together, all expressions of the one universe, our one planet, and the one mind of God and of the human species. This is not metaphysical mumbo-jumbo. It's the reality that science is revealing to us. They have different language for it. As Michael Dowd says, they use day language, while we spiritual types use night language – the language of Mystery. God “crowns us with the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting”. But the meaning is unmistakable. We are creatures of great dignity, able to select our future, able to choose wisdom over foolishness, able to choose the path of justice and peace for all. God says: “take this crown, it is your birthright, wear it like the dignified creatures you are...”

Put on “forever” the glory of God. Put it on and don't take it off. Why take it off? It's your true nature. Wear the crown with pride, friends.

The glory of God is personified in ancient Judaism by the feminine figure of Shekinah – the radiant presence of God in the created world. As Christians we imagine that Shekinah was fully present in Jesus of Nazareth. One of the predominant images for Jesus is the Light of God. The divine light within us recognizes this uncreated Light in Christ. It allures us toward a glorious future that can only be realized by those who dare to wear the crown of glory. To be in Christ is to be inexorably drawn to this Light – what life on this miracle planet could be like if we awakened to our higher nature. St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans that all of creation, all the creatures, all the biosystems are awaiting our arrival as sons and daughters of God. Friends, let's not keep creation waiting. Receive the crown of glory and be dare to living into the radiance of who you are.