



still waters

home church studies

Malachi 3.1-4

[Worship]

1 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; 3 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. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

1 Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. 2 Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting; 3 for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. 4 For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." 5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east as the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. 6 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. 7 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. 8 The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. 9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Baruch 5.1-9

Consider:

Peace and/or Justice? —

[Words]

The gospel begins with a long list of the political and religious luminaries of the day. Some claim this is simply to date the story, but we can't escape the irony. In the midst of all this power and prestige, in the midst of all these important titles and positions, the Word of God comes, not to the mighty rulers or high priests, but to...John, in the desert. John's task of preparing the way of the Lord has been long promised: In Zechariah's prophecy (Luke 1:76) and Gabriel's earlier vow to Zechariah (Luke 1:17), and in today's reading from Malachi: I am sending a messenger to prepare the way, the Lord will come to his temple. Who knew that temple would turn out to be a river in the wilderness!

The selection from Malachi responds to the age-old quandary, Why do "the good receive the treatment the wicked deserve, the wicked the treatment the good deserve"? (Ecclesiastes 8:14)—and in light of this, Where is the God of justice? (2:17). Malachi promises that God's judgment will be visited upon those who practice injustice: against the adulterer and liar, and especially against "those who oppress the wage-earner [grist for a Labor Day sermon?], the widow and the orphan, and who rob the settler of their rights" (3:5). The good news of justice for the weak entails judgment on the strong. Where is the God of justice? John the Baptist's message is that the reign of God has begun, and God's justice is at hand.

[Scripture]

Luke 3.1-6

1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3 He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"
