

Rev. Dan Welch Advent 2 12-4-22 Text- Zechariah 9:14-17
Arise and Shine- A Series of Special Services for Advent -Week 2: "Reflected Light"

Once upon a time a young handsome prince lived in his own stately castle. But that was before the curse. The enchantress, disguised as an old beggar woman, turned him into an ugly animal and changed all his servants into household items. Their names are now famous—Lumiere, Cogsworth, Mrs. Potts, and the little teacup named Chip. What did they call the prince? *Beast. The Beast!* Why? Because he was hideous and homely, repugnant and repulsive. So ashamed, the Beast hid in his castle, secluding himself from everyone and everything. But all that changed one day when a sweet young lady named Belle came strolling along and into his life. Beauty loves the Beast, and the Beast becomes beautiful.

Have you ever felt like the Beast? Rejected, alone and living in the shadows? Sure, you have. So have I. Frequently we run to our castle and hide so no one can see the ugly mess we make of our lives.

The Old Testament prophet Zechariah knew all about ugly messes. Living in the Persian province of Judah toward the end of the sixth century B.C., Zechariah was overwhelmed with spiritual messes. Joshua, the High Priest, is wearing filthy garments (Zechariah 3:3). The prophet

sees a vision that includes a woman stuck in something like a garbage can (Zechariah 5:7). Zechariah describes Philistines with “blood in their mouths and abominations between their teeth” (Zechariah 9:7). The prophet writes, “The cedar has fallen, the glorious trees are ruined!” (Zechariah 11:2). The beast fills the book of Zechariah!

It’s hard to find a page in the Bible where the beast doesn’t appear. Cain murders Abel. Saul hunts down David. One Herod kills babies while another Herod beheads John the Baptist. Pilate washes his hands of the whole mess. Even the sweet psalmist Asaph (who wrote twelve psalms), readily admits in Psalm 73:22, “I was senseless and ignorant, I was a brute beast before you.”

Although we have a million and one ways to deny the reality, a brute beast lives in us all. We become rude, defiant, angry and ugly. Losing our temper, we spew forth venomous words—making a mess of everything. Vowing to change, a week later we explode again in a savage frenzy. Think I’m overstating the case? Dare right now to look into your thoughts,

ponder the pattern your life has been weaving. Sometimes, it can get ugly, can't it? Really, really ugly.

Thank God for Zechariah 9:16, "On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land." Talk about a total makeover! Beauty loves the Beast, and the Beast becomes beautiful. Beautiful, indeed! God calls his people jewels on a crown shining in the land. By God's grace, we let our light shine before others so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven. By God's grace, we refuse to quarrel and complain and so we shine like stars in the heavens. By God's grace, we no longer walk in darkness but radiate with the light of the Lord!

Too bad Zechariah's story doesn't end there. The beast reared his ugly head again and this time his goal was singular; take the most beautiful person ever and make him totally repulsive. True, Zechariah envisions Christ, our King, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, righteous and having salvation. Yet Zechariah also prophecies that four days after Palm Sunday Christ will be sold for thirty pieces of

silver (11:12–13). Christ will be struck down and the sheep will scatter (13:7). The prophet foresees Christ on Good Friday, pierced with a spear (12:10). It got ugly, didn't it? Really, really ugly. The crown of thorns left deep gashes on Jesus' head. Nails disfigured his body. There are no words adequate enough to describe the sheer atrocity of it all.

Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus in his tomb. But three days later, early in the morning, some women arrived, and the tomb was empty! Peter and John ran to the tomb and they also found it empty. Here is where the angel asked, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen!" (Luke 24:5-6). Talk about a total makeover! Christ was dead and now he is alive. Jesus is alive to pursue one relentless, passionate and all-consuming goal: to make us perfectly beautiful—like the jewels in a crown to shine on his land!

Christ cleanses us from all guilt and shame. Zechariah prophecies that, too! The prophet envisions a fountain of water purifying us from everything that makes us so ugly (13:1). Christ's cleansing blood takes away our guilt, all of our guilt—our haunting, messy guilt.

There's more. Jesus not only takes away our guilt, He also takes away our messy, ugly shame. We don't have to drink our shame away, work our shame away, explain our shame away, eat our shame away, cry our shame away or bury our shame away. Jesus doesn't say, "Try harder." Jesus doesn't say, "You haven't done enough." No, Jesus comes to us in the pit of our guilt and shame. At our darkest point—when we feel the ugliest—Jesus says, "Beauty loves the beast, and the beast becomes forever beautiful." Forever beautiful!

Have you ever been feeling great, on cloud nine, whistling a happy tune, when all of a sudden something bad happens? You run a red light and get pulled over by the police. Your teenager comes home with a "D" on her report card. Or worse. You lose your job. You lose your health. You lose the love of your life. What is our response? We rant and rave, we moan and groan! We become rude, angry and unreasonable. It's so easy to react to hardships by behaving like a beast. When we come to our senses, the temptation is to run to our castle and hide, obsess with how

ugly we are, and get lost in endless guilt and shame. Please, please, don't do that.

Beauty loves the Beast, and the Beast becomes forever beautiful.

How can we be so sure? Zechariah 9:16, "On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land". That day Zechariah talks about? That day is today! It is here, right now! The Child of Bethlehem was born for you! He came to suffer and die for you, to cleanse you from guilt and shame. By God's grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, you are beautiful! Amen.