Sam Tells Stories, by Thierry Robberecht:

I’m Sam. I’m the most amazing kid in school. The kids at my new school just don’t know it yet. “My dad is an astronaut,” I tell them on my first day. “Is that true?” someone asks. “Of course it’s true. He flies to the Moon and Mars and all over the whole galaxy in his spaceship.” Everyone wants to be friends with me now. They all wish they had an astronaut for a dad. The next day at school, everyone’s talking about my dad. A little too much, actually. “Sam, has your dad flown to Mars lately?” “Yes,” I say. “He even met some aliens. They came to our house for dinner!” I’m starting to wish I hadn’t told this story. After school, I stay to play soccer with my new friends. By the time we’re done, my clothes are a mess. My mom is not happy. “We had a fight with some of the big kids,” I tell her. “They tried to take our lunchboxes!” Mom is furious. But not at me. Mom and Dad talk about the fight during dinner. They’re going to speak to my teacher! “She should be taking better care of the smaller children,” Mom says. I don’t say anything. That night, I can’t sleep.” The story goes on…Sam learns his lesson. He fesses up to his friends. They aren’t happy that he lied to them, but in an age-appropriate way, they forgive him and invite him into their soccer game.

There’s a reason we tell these stories to our children – because Sam couldn’t sleep that night. We want our children to know that lies catch up with us, that lying makes us uneasy, it eats away at our soul, even for the most callous. We want our children to know that living honestly and authentically feels good, it feels right. It feels good because we are living in right relationship with God. And, it’s important for us to remember that living in right relationship with God is not
an edict, it’s not a demand…it is God’s love, it is God’s desire for us to live in peace.

“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.” Let’s take a moment to talk about the historical context for our lesson from Baruch this morning. Upon the death of King Solomon in 930 BC, the twelve tribes of Israel were divided between two kingdoms, the Northern and the Southern. Ten of the tribes became the Northern Kingdom, also known as Israel, with a capital in Samaria. The two remaining tribes, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, became the Southern Kingdom, also known as Judah, with a capital in Jerusalem. The Northern Kingdom, the ten tribes known as Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 721 BC. The Southern Kingdom, the two tribes known as Judah, fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC. During the fall of the Southern Kingdom, the military elite and the cultural elite, the cultural heart of Judah, were taken from their homeland and forced into exile in Babylon. But, “God remembered them. For they went out from Jerusalem on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to Jerusalem, carried in glory, as on a royal throne.” God remembers them. Through God, Cyrus the Great, the Persian Conqueror of Babylonia, allowed the exiled Judeans to return to Judah. God remembers us. God desires to bring us home.

There’s a wonderful echo between the Old Testament and the Gospel lessons this morning. From Baruch we hear: “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.” From Luke we hear: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 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; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” Making the hills low and filling the valleys is God laying the path to bring us home. God wants
us to come home. Home to honesty. Home to our own authenticity. Home to peace.

In the last days and weeks and months, we’ve been hearing in the news about false claims and misleading claims, twisted facts and mangled truths. And, now, this morning, Scripture interprets for us: “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.’” Take off the garment of sorrow and affliction. This time will pass. We know that lies catch up with us. We know that the truth sets us free. And, in our spheres of influence, we can be vigilant in not allowing the recklessness of deceitful behavior to become a norm. This time will pass.

“Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction. God will give you evermore the name, ‘Righteous Peace.’” At our All Things Advent celebration last Sunday evening, we played Jeopardy. One of the questions, “Alex, Advent Trivia for 200,” was what do we pray for most during Advent? We pray for Peace. We pray for peace in this world. We pray for peace in our hearts, for the deep and abiding peace that comes from experiencing the love of God through an awareness of our authentic self. We wait for the Prince of Peace.

In this holy season of Advent, give yourself the gift of waiting, pause in the midst of the bustling and wait…experience God peace. Listen carefully to the words of this enduring prayer:

“O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and in confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray you, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God.” Pause, reflect, explore your thoughts and motivations and behavior, embrace your authentic self, and there you will know God. Do you
know that relaxing feeling that comes from taking a deep breath? We use it to calm ourselves when we are anxious or troubled or a bit overwhelmed. Take a deep breath. Breathe in God’s love. Exhale, let go of the misperceptions. Let go. God’s peace is right there, right there in the midst of your authentic self. Allow that peace to embrace your life, to comfort and inspire you as you re-engage in all of life. Let go. The Prince of Peace will come. Amen.