

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, Illinois
The Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 20, 2019
Isaiah 62:1-5**

For the sake of Zion I will not be silent. For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth shining brightly, and her salvation burns like a torch. Nations will see your righteousness, and all kings will see your glory. You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will assign to you. Then you will be a beautiful crown in the LORD's hand, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God.

You will never again be called Abandoned, and your land will never again be called Desolation, for you will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land will be called Married, because the LORD delights in you, and your land will be married. For just as a young man marries a virgin, your sons will marry you, and just as a bridegroom rejoices over a bride, your God will rejoice over you.

I want you to picture yourself at a wedding. Who or what gets the most attention at a wedding? Is it the pretty flowers? Maybe. The groom? No, don't kid yourself. The worship service? Perhaps. People could focus on one of these, but don't most people focus on the beautiful bride? Everyone stands to see her when she walks down the aisle. She looks radiant and glowing in her dress. Generally, a bride gets the most attention at a wedding.

Honestly, all the attention which a bride receives is a good thing. The groom loves his bride and seeing her look so beautiful puts a smile on his face. A proud dad loves walking his beaming daughter down the aisle while she feels like a princess. The guests love to see the bride in her dress. You know who else loves a beautiful bride? God does. We'll examine the way the Lord delights in his bride the church. He has restored her to glory. He has made her his own.

We'll look at the first way the Lord delights in his bride the church by the fact he has restored her to her former glory. Isaiah begins, **"For the sake of Zion I will not be silent. For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth shining brightly, and her salvation burns like a torch. Nations will see your righteousness, and all kings will see your glory. You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will assign to you."**

"Then you will be a beautiful crown in the LORD's hand, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God."

Isaiah doesn't come right out and say it, but carefully reading these words gives you the sense that the Jewish people were going through some difficult times. The Lord says he will give his people a new name, nations will see their glory and the people will be a beautiful crown which is placed on a royal head in the palm of their God. It sounds like he is going to restore something which was lost.

Now, the question becomes what was lost and needed to be restored? Our section is much like a camera which is zoomed and zeroed in on one specific spot in a picture. We need to slowly pull it back out and widen our view in order to understand what needed to be restored. Isaiah writes his prophecy during a time upheaval. The nation of Israel had been divided into two countries, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, and during Isaiah's time the northern kingdom was conquered and deported.

The Assyrian army which had conquered Israel also ravaged Judah. The Assyrians conquered the entire land except for Jerusalem and the only way Jerusalem escaped was because God rescued the city. The dramatic rescue should have made things better for Judah, but Isaiah's prophecy peers into the future and it reveals a different reality was fast approaching. A new kingdom, Babylon, would soon threaten Judah's very existence by taking her into exile around 100 years after Isaiah wrote his prophecy.

Does a country which has been defeated and deported sound like a victorious country to you? Does it sound like a place of beauty and majesty? Or a radiant bride walking down the aisle while everyone watches? Not at all. It sounds like a bride who is dirty and filthy whose dress is ripped and covered in dirt. It sounds like a bride who people look away from and hide their faces because they don't want to look at her.

How did this bride end up looking so frazzled and worn? It has to do with her sinful actions and the choices which the Israelites made. God had chosen Israel to be his bride. The Lord looked at her the way

a groom looks at his beautiful bride when she is walking down the aisle. However, Zion had turned her back on the Lord. She abused the Lord's love by dirtying herself when she was unfaithful to the Lord and served other gods instead of him.

The dramatic decline of a beautiful bride to a beaten down unfaithful wife is instructive for God's bride the church and her members. How so? It shows us just how easy it is for God's beautiful bride to lose her beauty. The reason the Lord needed to restore his bride is because the Lord was no longer her first love. She had dirtied herself with other gods. We might not worship gods of wood or stone, but we need to be on guard against serving other gods.

What might some of them be? One god for a lot of people, including God's people, is money. People can become obsessed with making money or thinking that money is the key to happiness in life. They pursue money with reckless abandon. They work however long it takes, learn whatever tricks they need to learn and become as cutthroat as possible in order to accumulate the most money they can. Do you spend more time thinking about earning money than you do thinking about your Lord?

Another god people worship is time. Life can get incredibly busy for people. Kids are involved in all sorts of activities which fill up the schedule. Work follows you home and never stops. Projects at home demand your attention. It all makes you wish that you had 48 hours in a day, but I need to ask, where does the Lord rank on your time priority list? Do you fashion your schedule around him and his priorities, or does he take a back seat to what you need to get done?

You and I might not worship gods of wood and stone, but we have our own idols which we hide in our hearts. We worship money and the pursuit of it while choosing to focus all our energy and time on what we want. These mixed up priorities endanger us and turn us from being the Lord's beautiful bride into a bride who rejects the glory which her husband has showered on her for a life filled with the mud and muck of sin.

Who could love someone who has turned their back on him? **"For the sake of Zion I will not be silent. For the sake of Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth shining brightly, and her salvation burns like a torch. Nations will see your righteousness, and all kings will see your glory. You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will assign to you. Then you will be a beautiful crown in the LORD's hand, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God."**

The Lord loves his church and wants to make sure she and her members have a right relationship with him. Did you hear the way the Lord speaks about his bride? Her salvation will burn brightly like a torch on a dark night. Everyone will see her glory and righteousness. The Lord will take her and change her name to make her radiant and splendid in his sight. The transformation will be total and it will be complete. How will the Lord do this?

The Lord will do this because he delights to call his church his own. **"You will never again be called Abandoned, and your land will never again be called Desolation, for you will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land will be called Married, because the LORD delights in you, and your land will be**

married. For just as a young man marries a virgin, your sons will marry you, and just as a bridegroom rejoices over a bride, your God will rejoice over you."

The reason the Lord loves his church is because he has made her his own. The Lord loves you because he has made you his own. Did you hear the way he speaks about you because you belong to him? He says you will never be abandoned or your land will never again be called desolate. He proudly proclaims his delight is in you. God rejoices over you in the same way a groom rejoices when he sees his bride. He rejoices because you are his and he is yours.

Marriages are happy occasions. Two people who love each other make vows to each other and promise to be faithful to each other. They bring two lives together and create a new family. They are grand times. However, the Lord's marriage to his church is a bit different. The ceremony didn't take place in a church. It took place on a cross. Vows weren't exchanged between the bride and groom. Instead, lives were exchanged. The Lord exchanged his life for his church.

God the Father officiated the ceremony and said the only way for Christ to marry the church was through his death. Jesus loved the church and he responded by willingly giving his life for her. What was the end result? The church and her members belong to him. Think back to the hand which holds the royal crown which the groom places on his bride. What do you see in it? You see a hole don't you? Look at the beaming face which adores his bride. What do you see? Marks on his head.

What made Jesus willing to give his life for his church? He gave it to make her his own. Jesus gave his life to make you his own. The reason he wants to be the main priority in your life is because he delights in you. He doesn't want to take all your money away from you. He doesn't want you to be in church every second of your day, but he wants you to remember who you are. You belong to him. You are beautiful to him. You are his delight. You are his glory. Live a life worthy of that calling. Amen.