

Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 20, 2019
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Isaiah 62:1-5 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.

2 The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.

3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate,
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.

5 For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

“God’s Reason for Rejoicing”

As we take control over the information that comes to us, it’s nice to know we can customize our news. Have you seen this? Maybe it’s just the algorithms that notice the type of news sites you visit and make recommendations based on your history. But some sources actually allow you to decide where you get your headlines from and what kind of news stories pop up most prominently for you. One motivational speaker was talking to the owner of a news website and suggested we should be able to take a little sliding bar and adjust how much positive news we personally want to balance with the negative news.

But we already do that in a certain sense. We decide which kinds of inspirational stories motivate us and give us hope for the future. Sometimes we look to the past. We pick up on the stories of our ancestors and elders. We admire their courage and bravery. We find inspiration in the way they overcame adversity and injustice. Sometimes we focus on the true tales of trailblazers. You can read bedtime stories to your daughter about the first female astronaut or tell about the child with learning disabilities who grew up to be a prize winning inventor. Sometimes we even take inspiration in science fiction, opening up the world of possibilities, causing us to question if anything is actually impossible.

In Isaiah chapter 62 God wants us to find inspiration that we haven't customized for ourselves, but God has customized for us. But these verses highlight for us God's reasons for rejoicing. And God rejoices because he acts for us, God changes our status, and God rejoices over what he has done for us.

I. God Goes into Action for You

One of the first steps to finding the reason behind God's rejoicing is to understand what kind of relationship God had with Isaiah's audience. God often had a strained relationship with Israel. So often God's people think their lives are in sync with God without verifying with God whether that's true or not. They have the perception that since they consider themselves God's people, everything they do must be acceptable and approved by God.

It also helps to understand some of the Bible terminology for how God interacts with his people. The Bible sometimes uses phrases like "God remembered" or "God went down to look." Here we have another one. When God promises he "**will not keep silent,**" it means more than just that God won't be like your shy cousin who keeps to himself in a corner and doesn't speak up in a big crowd (Isaiah 62:1). It means the Lord doesn't give up on his people no matter how they've treated him. It means he is issuing a worldwide proclamation and springing into action at this point in time.

II. God Changes Your Status

God had to act on behalf of his people because this strained relationship so often turns into a broken relationship with God. Some of that stems from a difference in the way people see God and the way he really is.

One contemporary theologian describes how people have absorbed too much of our society's ideas about God. He describes how we have allowed our desires to override what God is really like and who he really is. He breaks those tendencies down into two basic categories. We either imagine God as a Negotiator God or Santa Claus God. You can guess how attractive it would be to thank of God as Santa Claus. He gives without conditions or demands. He has a bag full of goodies, handing out solutions to our problems, making our dreams come true, and gives us all the feels.¹

But the Negotiator God is probably a more common and dangerous imagining of God, at least for people who care enough about their relationship with God to consult the Scriptures. We slip into thinking that if we give something up for God, he will have to oblige us and give us what we are after. If we do something impressive for God, that should be enough for him to take away a particularly painful burden. I know I'm not perfect, but if God that is grading on a curve, my life has to rise as near to the top as possible. If he realizes who I am, then he should find reason for rejoicing.

That wide gulf between how people see God and how God sees them explains why God needs to take action and go to work for his people. Without God's work, every single one of us would earn the label "Deserted" and "Desolate." Deserted, because in our negotiations

¹ Volf, Miroslav. Free of Charge. Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 2005, p. 27.

with God, we have nothing to offer God that he doesn't already have. Deserted, because even if we manage to hold up our end of the bargain, we have no way to force God to hold up the terms and conditions we've dictated to him. Deserted, because if we view our relationship with God dependent on what we've done or what we're doing or what we're going to do, than the standards set by Jesus are a more crushing burden than the Law of Moses. We would have to be just like Jesus before we could expect to get anything from God. Desolate, because we are so willing to receive from God without giving any thought to our deeper relationship with God. Desolate, because our self-absorbed expectations only fuel our me-first mindset and drive our lives further out of sync with God. And when God looks at this brokenness inside us, he sees no reason for rejoicing.

So God goes into action. In these verses it's especially important to establish the fact that God is the one speaking. Then you can note where all the emphasis is. Who is the one gets all the credit? God is the one who says: **"I will not keep silent...I will not be quiet."** (Isaiah 62:1) When God says **"you shall be called by a new name,"** he makes sure we are aware it's not a name we take for ourselves, but rather **"that the mouth of the LORD will give."** (Isaiah 62:2) And perhaps most impressively: **"No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married."** (Isaiah 62:4) If your name before was "Deserted," God will now call you "I Delight in You." If your name before was "Desolate," God will bring you into a brand new relationship with him. God will establish this relationship solely on his grace. The true God, the God of the Bible, is neither a Negotiator nor a Santa Claus God. The true God will change your status so he can rejoice.

III. God Rejoices over What He's Done for You

Personally, I love those lighthearted little features on news websites or little blurbs in the paper or stories about pets before the evening news cuts to commercials. They help us realize there is more going on in our world than political turmoil and criminal behavior and the scandalous behavior of celebrities. But you and I need something more in our lives that just feel good stories to give us reason to rejoice.

Isaiah chapter 62 is a section of Scripture that is uplifting and cheerful. And, if you take the time to read the other 65 chapters of Isaiah, you'll realize how refreshing that is. But if we fail to see Jesus in the fulfillment of this prophecy from Isaiah, we'll be left with something inspirational along the lines of a fairy tale. But when we see God's action, God's change, and God's delight all centered on Jesus, we see a remarkable transformation takes place inside his people.

Sometimes when you go on social media you run across someone you haven't seen in a while. You see that their relationship status has changed since the last time you saw them or check in on them online. It's only one aspect of their life, but it has profound implications. So you scroll through their history. You comb through pictures and posts. You try to discover what happened, what caused this relationship change. And you try to read between the lines to discover if this is a positive change in their life. If the pictures posted

about the same time as the status change are happy ones, filled with two people smiling, then you decide you can be happy for them.

When we see the joy in Isaiah chapter 62, it's all about a relationship change. As we scroll through these verses and take in these images, we see God rejoice in you. But we discover it's all about what God has done for you. God is no more Negotiator God than he is Santa Claus God, because he is the God who marries. God doesn't see you based on what you've done for him. God doesn't look at you because of your past. God takes you as his own so he can give you the gifts he is uniquely qualified to extend. Martin Luther found this picture of bride and groom an especially meaningful illustration of our relationship with God. He explains why: "Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his. If he gives her his body and very self, how shall he not give her all that is his? And if he takes the body of the bride, how shall he not take all that is hers?"² Jesus Christ marries you to take all your baggage, all your failures to coerce God into negotiating with you and all your self-absorbed Santa-like wishes for him. Jesus takes all your baggage and gives you all his perfection.

Some people like to keep pictures of their most joyful memories close at all times. In the dorm room when studying long nights starts to take its toll is the high school graduation picture. In the office wall where things are always a little chaotic stands framed the diploma they worked so hard to acquire. On their desk at work is that wedding photo that makes them smile with pride every time they look at it. Prominently displayed on the wall at home is the picture of a son or daughter moments after they came into the world, with mom and dad smiling down lovingly.

Because of what Jesus did, God can look at you that same way. Your "**vindication shines out like the dawn**" because Jesus met every requirement of God's law (Isaiah 62:1). Your "**salvation**" sends beams of light "**like a blazing torch**" because Jesus took his perfect life and flawless performance and made it yours (Isaiah 62:1) God now takes you in his hand and shows you off like a brilliant "**crown of splendor**" and "**a royal diadem**" (Isaiah 62:3). God admires your restored relationship through Jesus Christ and holds out all his gifts of grace for everyone to see and admire.

In John chapter 2 we learned about a magnificent miracle Jesus performed. He spared the bride and groom serious embarrassment when he gave them a new supply of high quality wine. But the transformation Jesus worked in you through faith is much more impressive than changing water into wine. Jesus Christ sees your strained and broken relationship with God and changes your heart into what God has promised it to be. His greater miracle is changing your heart so his greater glory is the joy he finds in you through his salvation. God's reaction to you depends on his actions for you. God's delight over you comes from his

² Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 31: Career of the Reformer I*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 31, p. 351). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

gifts to you. God's rejoicing in his people results from his work on your behalf. God rejoices over you because of what he's done for you in Jesus Christ. Amen.