

The Lord Delights In You

Isaiah 62:1-5

Do you like weddings? What about wedding anniversaries? What about remarriages, when a divorces couple decides to try again after a betrayal or ugly relationship.

The dominant concept of Isaiah's exilic writing is liberation from captivity, God would soon take steps to end the Babylonian exile of Israel, and restoration of relationship with God. Isaiah reminded the people of God's saving activity in the exodus, providing a basis on which to trust the promises of God to act similarly in their generation. The image of God's liberating involvement in history has fueled the imagination of many religious movements in history, including the Puritans, who understood their flight from the bondage of England, through the Atlantic waters to the promised land of New England, as a new exodus given by a providential God.

The exodus was long the dominant biblical theme in African American church life, as the people worked toward justice from the days of slavery through the nadir under Jim Crow to the American civil rights movement. Whether in Latin America, South Africa, or in the United States, restoration of right relationships has been understood to mean the end of oppression and establishment of justice.

The people of Israel were an oppressed people, captive in a foreign land. Contrary to what the oppressors may say—the people of God are valuable to God and do not deserve the treatment they receive. "You will be a crown of

beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God."

The prophet Isaiah had already announced God's intention to bring about the defeat of the Babylonians and the return of the exiles. In our scripture, those events had taken place, but all was still not right. The Babylonians were defeated, but the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem had met obstacles and delays. The prophet addressed a people who had been full of hope but now must battle the deteriorating morale caused by broken dreams and crumbling faith. The people wondered if God was powerless to fulfill the promises—or whether God was indifferent to the plight of God's people.

Isaiah did not announce another promise or declare another good news headline. No, he went directly to God; demanding that God do something about the situation: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch" (v. 1). We don't have to be afraid to tell God the truth of our situation, the good or the bad.

The story is told of a young but wise priest visited one of her parishioners in the nursing home where he lived. He did not speak or look at her. He simply stared straight ahead. Instead of trying to chat with him, she went straight to the Psalms. When she read one of the laments there, his face softened and he looked at his visitor for the first time: "Finally, somebody knows how I feel."

Someone knows how we feel: this is the power of Isaiah's writing for the discouraged returnees and for any of us dealing with the feeling that God has turned away in indifference. To follow the prophet's example, we need to acknowledge we are people dealing with defeat and broken dreams, before we can move on to words of hope and new beginnings.

The vindication of the oppressed and reestablishment of relationships comes as a surprise to those who fail to see that God is about a new work—especially those who will lose their status and power. Isaiah said, "The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory." Then Israel received a new name from God, which meant a new identity and new relationship with God. The people have been called "Forsaken," and Judea called "Desolate," but God changed their name to "My Delight Is in Her" and "Married." A great new day dawned through God's redemptive power, initiating a drastic reversal of the order that vindicated Israel and showed the Lord's delight in the people.

The surprising work of God is common in Scripture. *YHWH* chose a ragged, not particularly moral, semi nomadic clan as God's special people. God chose us, a people from different cultures, backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, likes and passions, to be God's people. Hannah spoke of this in her great prayer of thanksgiving at the birth of Samuel. Mary said that God surprises with the reversals of fortunes: God "scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts"; "brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly"; "filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" ([Luke 1:51-53](#)). Jesus, himself born in humble conditions, often made this same point. Not only did Jesus' fraternization with the marginalized of his society demonstrate God's surprising work, but parables such as the Laborers in the Vineyard ([Matt. 20:1-16](#), ending with "The last will be first, and the first will be last").

Name changes also can signify a change in relationships and in the future. When a husband and wife hyphenate their names, or more traditionally, when a woman takes her new husband's last name, the change in names is intended to symbolize the new relationship and the new future

for each partner. When a neglected child goes through the foster system and is then adopted by parents ready to love her as their very own, then her change of surname is good news signifying a priceless gift of love and a new future.

Names in the Old Testament offer clues to the character of the person named. A change in name can represent a change in character, such as the new name of Israel given to Jacob (Gen. 32:28). Instead of being called "Forsaken," Israel can be called "My Delight Is in Her." Instead of the land being called "Desolate," the land may be called "Married" (in Heb., *be'ulah*), a name that signifies God's commitment to Israel and Israel's good future.

God named the land Beulah, which means Married; which reminds us God's liberating activity grows out of God's covenant promise to Israel—for marriage always evokes ideas of covenant. In most cultures the gods of the ancient world were often unpredictable; one could not know when favor or disfavor might be forthcoming. YHWH, the God of Israel, imposed limits on God's own freedom to exercise power. In the covenant, God promised steadfast love—*hesed*—as the basis of the relationship with the people, and in return the people promised to love and serve God. **Rick Nutt**

Isaiah's lament and protest were real, but neither can it properly be seen as Isaiah's last word. There is good news here—very good news, made explicit in a change of names.

What the prophet announces to the people of Israel, God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We "who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). We, who may properly be designated "sinners," have been renamed as God's "beloved children." We too have received a priceless gift of love and a new future. God comes toward us

with all of the delight and joy that a bridegroom has for his bride. What a startling image of God's grace this is, full of attraction to and love for us.

Everyone loves a good wedding. While we may never witness the changing of water into wine at our weddings, as the people do at Cana when Jesus performs his first "sign," we do get a glimpse through the bridegroom and bride of God's great and personal love for each one of us. **W. Carter Lester**

The couple's reunion will be as tender and delightful as the honeymoon (Jer. 2:15), as when "a young man marries a young woman" (v. 5). That is how God who has built her, created her, and formed her will marry her again. Like the bridegroom rejoicing over the bride, "so shall your God rejoice over you" (v. 5). This is her vindication, her restoration, and her salvation. Not only will she be safe and protected; she will be raised up and singled out from among the nations to be God's wife, the one in whom God delights above all others. God restates the promise to take her back and restore the household in tender love and affection. For the community struggling in conflict over how to rebuild city walls, how to rebuild the temple, how to govern themselves, how to decide who belongs among them, Isaiah's word was a kind of epiphany. It revealed God in their midst, defending, protecting, and insisting on their special beauty.

This God is the God of the poor, afflicted, enslaved, downtrodden, distressed, or divorced. This God tells us we are chosen, singled out, selected from all the earth's people as God's beloved bride, and that the Lord delights in us.. **Kathleen M. O'connor**

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