



Isaiah 62:1-5  
 What's Under Your Tree?  
 Love

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 Second Sunday in Advent

This morning we continue our Advent series, looking at some of the passages in Isaiah that, though written several centuries prior to the birth of Jesus Christ, are ultimately and most completely, fulfilled in him. So, even though Isaiah is a part of the Old Testament, it really serves as a bridge between the OT and the New Testament, as there is a strong connection between Jesus and what Isaiah writes.

And this morning's passage is the tip of the iceberg of three chapters in a row – Isaiah 60, 61, and 62 – that speak of God's commitment to His people, his promise to be with them, his transformative work in their lives, and more. Isaiah, like all of Scripture, is written primarily to people who live by faith and walk in relationship with God. So although this was written long before Jesus lived, let alone before us today, it is still applicable to those of us who walk with God, or are at least open to God's voice and work in our lives. So these chapters, and their promises, along with the rest of Isaiah, extend to us today.

**And: If you're questioning God's presence in your life, or his plans for your life...if you're wondering if God loves you...these chapters are for you.** You should go home and read Isaiah 60-62 on your own. And the fact is, we all go through stretches of life where we wonder about where God is and whether or not he still loves us. We wonder about our place in the cosmos as we go through the same routines day after day after day. So if you think you're the only one who asks those questions or thinks those thoughts or ever has doubts about God...you need to realize that you're not the only one and it's safe to ask them, and it's safe to take those things to God. That's what a good chunk of Isaiah shows us, as well as the Psalms, Lamentations, Jeremiah, and other parts of Scripture do. The Bible is filled with people who cry out to God in their times of distress.

**And: We see in Scripture that the life lived in relationship with God is not without it's challenges.** Look at Israel here: their cities are in ruins, the people are scattered, they're in exile, they're either living in a foreign

country, or if they got left behind they're still under foreign rule. Nearly 3,000 years later, there are people today who think that if they receive Jesus as Lord and Savior that life will be all roses, smooth and straight, full of nothing but comfort and ease. But that simply isn't true. We ought not to believe that the life of the Christian will be easy, because Jesus himself had anything but an easy life – he was a homeless, itinerant preacher, who was loved by many and hated by many, and he died on a cross. We shouldn't expect a whole lot different for ourselves. But in the midst of that we get words of hope, and words that remind us that God loves us and is with us in the midst of the difficulties, and a new day will dawn, just as the cross did not have the final say for Jesus, but rather the empty tomb did. And that's what chapters 60-62 are all about. These are empty tomb verses, that carry us through our times when we feel like we're on the cross next to Jesus.

Listen to some of these words from these chapters, and remember these are coming to Israel in a time of exile...probably some time later than the passage we looked at last week when the Assyrians had exiled them, and now in all likelihood under Babylonian rule when Babylon conquered Assyria. Either way, they're still in exile, it's not a good situation, and it's been several decades at this point. In fact, one author I read this week described them as "exploited" and "abused." No one should feel exploited or abused.

And here's what God says about their future through the prophet:

**“Arise, shine, for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.  
See, darkness covers the earth  
and thick darkness is over the peoples,  
but the Lord rises upon you  
and his glory appears over you.  
Nations will come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:1-3).**

**“Although you have been forsaken and hated,  
with no one traveling through,  
I will make you the everlasting pride  
and the joy of all generations” (Isaiah 60:15)**

**“The sun will no more be your light by day,  
nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you,  
for the Lord will be your everlasting light,  
and your God will be your glory” (Isaiah 60:19).**

**“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:1-2).**

61:7, “Instead of your shame  
you will receive a double portion,  
and instead of disgrace  
you will rejoice in your inheritance.”

Those are incredible words coming to a disillusioned and defeated people. As some of you know, Jesus read 61:1-2 (still on the screen) in a worship service. And in that worship service in the synagogue in Nazareth, after he read it, he said, **“Today, this has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:20)**. For anyone who says that Jesus was a good, moral teacher, but not God in the flesh, not divine, as Jesus himself claimed to be, this has to be reckoned with. *Either* Jesus was divine as he claimed and as we celebrate at Christmas, and he fulfilled the Old Testament as he claimed right here, *or* he wasn’t good and wasn’t moral at all, and was a lunatic. Because this is another instance, much as we looked at last week, of Jesus elevating himself, not in arrogance or pride, but nonetheless, proclaiming to being the one who brings this good news and sets the captives free...and that there’s something different about himself. And either he’s right we should bow down in worship; or he’s wrong, and we should head to the slopes and go skiing because Steven’s Pass got 17 inches last night and that’s a legit powder day

that skiers like me dream of. But as much as I love skiing...I'm staying right here, because I believe Jesus is who he claims to be: that he came to set you free from the weight and the effect of your sins so that you and I would have abundant and eternal life. That's the kind of good news being proclaimed here in these three chapters of Isaiah.

So Isaiah 60-62 – and there are others, too, but these are like the crown jewel of them all – these are words of encouragement, words of hope, words of joy. And especially in today's passage from Isaiah 62, we see that they are words of love as well. **They describe for us God's incredible love and what that love then means for us.** God loves his creation, and He loves his people who walk by faith in Him, and that means something deep and profound for people who receive that love in their lives.

We see this love even though the word isn't used here, as God declares that he will come to the rescue. In the first verse we see that He will not keep silent, he will not remain quiet, until Jerusalem's "vindication," or her "righteousness" may be a better translation...he will not remain quiet until her "righteousness" and her "salvation" shine like the dawn and like a blazing torch (62:1). In other words: they're going to be shining brightly for the world to see. They'll be like a beacon of light to a dark world around them. This is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, **"Let your light shine before others so they would see your good deeds, and glorify their father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).**

In both instances and whenever we see these themes in Scripture, the idea is that the people around us are watching, the world is watching, to see how we who have acknowledged God's love for us and cling to God's love for us...they're watching to see how we live: Do we demonstrate a transformed life, do we practice what we preach, do we love our neighbors as ourselves, do we live a life of faith – completely abandoned to God, and so forth.

And then we get to a promise in the second half of verse two that the Israelites will "be called by a new name, that the mouth of the Lord will bestow." This is profound, because names are powerful. And it's not just the names that we're known by formally – Brian, Jim, Jennifer, Gwen, Al, Jane,

Bob, Barbara, etc....it's not those names that usually have a lot of power over us. (Though when my parents said, "Brian Bradford North!" there was power in my name then, that's for sure!) **It's the names that people attribute to us, or we attribute to ourselves that can have a powerful impact on us.** They have sway in our lives. And God is saying to the Israelites, no longer will they be called Deserted and Desolate. Instead, they will be called beautiful names that you and I would probably liked to be called, like Hephzibah, and their land will be called Beulah. ☺ My grandmother on my dad's side was named Beulah. Beulah Bradford, and then Beulah North when she was married. I never thought too much of the name, and it's not common these days, but I have an appreciation for it now.

So while these names might be foreign to us, the *meanings* of these names we would love to have said about us: **Hephzibah means, "my delight is in her" and Beulah means, "married."** So God's delight is in his people, and the "married" is said to be the name for the land – meaning, their homeland, Israel. The land being called "married" is the one that probably raises some questions for us. And what it means is that the people will be back in the land from which they've been exiled. This place, Jerusalem and the rest of the country, is where they long to be. And this land will be reunited with the people who call it home; they'll be brought back together, like a marriage is the coming together of a husband and wife.

So this is a beautiful thing that God will do, and it's a sign and a promise of his love for them, and with this marriage metaphor being used, it kind of reinforces this idea and theme of love as well.

And then it gets taken a step further in verse 5, where it goes on to talk about their "Builder" – which is a reference to God as their Creator, and as the one who will lead them in building back up Jerusalem and the nation of Israel – this Builder God will be married to his people. **It ("Builder") is a metaphor for the love and the commitment that God has for them, and he will rejoice over them just as a groom rejoices over his bride.**

I mean, this is an incredible love that God has for His people. And God has that same love for you and me. And maybe you're here this morning and

you've had trouble acknowledging and receiving that love because you've been in an exiled place in life. Maybe part of that exile is the names that have been bestowed upon you. God gives you a new name, just as he did to the Israelites. They're no longer Deserted and desolate – they are delighted in, and married to their God who loves them. Verse 12 gives us more names still that God calls them – Holy people, Redeemed, Sought After, The City No Longer Deserted.

**These are the kinds of new names God still gives us.** And they're names that represent the reality of how God sees us, and the reality of our relationship with him and with others as well. Whether the negative names are there because you call yourself those things, or others do...either way, God gives you a new name. I don't know about you, but I'm great at giving myself bad names. A few nights ago I was changing the locks our front door. I had the hardest time getting the deadbolt to get put together. I couldn't get the screws to line up...things kept getting dislodged, falling on the floor...I had the dead bolt upside down for a while, then right side up, then it got upside down again. It took me almost an hour to install a deadbolt! It should have been 10 minutes. And as things progressed downhill, I kept saying to myself, "Brian, you're a failure. You can't even install a deadbolt lock. What a klutz. You think you're going to add on to your house? No way. You're incompetent when it comes to anything like this." No one in my family was saying those things. Heck, they were mostly oblivious to my internal frustrations until I slammed the door in frustration, sending parts of the deadbolt scattering. It wasn't my best moment, to be sure. But God gives us new names that replace the negative ones we have like those.

My name and your name, need not be "failure" any more, but "more than able."

Your name need not be "condemned" any more, but "forgiven."

Your name need not be "loner," but "teammate."

Your name need not be "orphan" but "family."

Your name need not be "materialistic" but "spiritual."

Your name need not be "outcast" but "included."

Your name need not be "enemy" but "friend."

Your name need not be "shackled" but "free."

Your name need not be “produce more at work” but “receiver of grace.”

Your name need not be “hoarder” but “generous.”

Your name need not be “hated” or “unlovable” but “loved.”

These are the kind of new names that God gives us. **And this is true because God loves you and sees you differently than the world sees you or than you even see yourself.** Because of his love for you...for me...for others in the world...he sees us as his children, as the object of his affection. He sees value and potential in you. He sees someone who's worth living for...he sees someone who's worth dying for...he sees someone who's worthy rising from the grave for. That's how much he loves you, it's why he gives you a new name; and like the “hope” which we looked at last week, I pray you'd open the gift of God's love this Christmas. Let's Pray...Amen.