

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 17, 2016

Isaiah 62:1-5

The Mouth of the LORD Bestows a New Name

Rev. George Ferch

Dear Friends in Christ,

For me, one of the greatest joys is witnessing brides and grooms make their vows. The man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife and the two become one flesh. God establishes a new family, a new home. The bride is radiant in her beautiful dress, hair and make-up. Her heart is radiant because of her husband's commitment to be faithful to her and forsake all others.

One custom in connection with marriage is the wife taking her husband's surname. The custom reflects the unity of marriage. It also speaks to the man's great responsibility as the head of the family to sacrifice all for his wife, even his life, just as Christ the heavenly Bridegroom sacrificed his life for his Bride, the church.

The LORD God used Isaiah's mouth to speak of the spiritual marriage between him and the church. That marriage includes God bestowing on us a new name. This name indicates our intimate unity with him and our radiance by virtue of that unity.

The Mouth of the LORD Bestows a New Name. No longer are we deserted or desolate. The LORD has taken us as his holy Bride.

Israel did not look like a radiant bride. In fact, we might say, God soon would leave her at the altar on account of her sin of idolatry. God would desert both Jerusalem and the land of Israel as a husband would desert his wife or a mother deserts her children. The Babylonians would lay waste to the land. Israel's friends and neighbors would call her "Deserted" and "Desolate."

This desertion and desolation would come to an end, however. The LORD wanted his people to know that. God said through Isaiah, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch."

God would not keep silent so that the church would be glorified as his. This is God's Promise of the Savior for Israel's sins and our sins. We are Zion. We are Jerusalem, the church. No one may call us deserted or desolate. The LORD has taken us as his Bride. The LORD God has forgiven all of our sins. He has declared us righteous in Christ's righteousness and taken us to himself as a holy Bride, radiant in Christ. Our righteousness that shines out like the dawn and pierces the darkness like a blazing torch is Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law as the world's Epiphany Savior. God would not rest, not be silent but through the church proclaim life and salvation in Jesus Christ.

The LORD has taken us as his holy Bride. "You will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. He has given us a new name, his name...as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

Hephzibah means "my joy in her," Beulah means "the wedded one." The LORD has taken joy in us through Christ and joined us to him as his holy Bride. We now bear those names, his name, and shine out the radiance of the gospel for all to see. This is one of the reasons God has joined us to himself. Jesus redeemed us with his cross so we can shine the radiance of his glory out for all to see.

This is Epiphany. "The nations will see your righteousness and all kings your glory...you will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God."

As we take the gospel out into the world, people see Christ's radiant glory as our Redeemer, as their Savior. Just as a beautiful bride is the glory of her groom, we are the glory of God because we are radiant in the holiness Jesus earned for us and offered as the full payment for our sins. The mouth of the LORD bestows a new name. That new name is the Bride of Christ, the church.

Through Isaiah, the LORD prophesied of the day of the New Testament Church. The church, believers, is a glorious crown, a royal crown. We are the glorious work of the LORD. The church is the greatest creation God has made greater even than the heavens and the earth. These will pass away one day. God's greatest glory is his grace. His gracious working has made his church. We are his masterpiece.

God's greatest joy is the glorification of his church. It is good for us to remember that as at times it seems as if the world is getting the better of God's people. The church never will pass away because it is built on God's eternal Word. It is the eternal kingdom of his Christ. Even in persecution, especially in persecution, God "will not keep silent until her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch."

This is our Epiphany mission, our Bridegroom's surname we bear. Amen. <SDG>