

“The Garland of God”
CCUM - 14 August 2016

Isaiah 62: 1-5

- 1 For Zion’s sake I won’t keep silent,
and for Jerusalem’s sake I won’t sit still
until her righteousness shines out like a light,
and her salvation blazes like a torch.
- 2 Nations will see your righteousness,
all kings your glory.
You will be called by a new name,
which the Lord’s own mouth will determine.
- 3 You will be a splendid garland [a stunning
crown in the palm of God’s] hand,
[a jeweled gold cup held high in the hand of your God.]
- 4 You will no longer be called Abandoned,
and your land will no longer be called Deserted.
Instead, you will be called [Hephzibah] My Delight Is in Her,
and your land, [Beulah] Married.
Because God delights in you,
your land will be cared for once again.
- 5 As a young man marries a young woman,
so your sons will marry you.
With the joy of a bridegroom because of his bride,
so your God will rejoice because of you.

Because God delights in you

What’s in a name? I don’t know about you, but Al and I found it easier to choose and agree upon girl names. Well, we had sons. After we had eliminated some names, we picked Wade for Al’s grandmother, Jemima Letitia McWade. I remember we had two names for our 2nd son Zak when I went into labor, and after he was born, the name Zak won out. Though I can’t remember what the other name one was, the name Zak has always felt right. I’ve told the story before that about a week before our youngest son was born, I brought a list of about ten possible boy names to the dinner table, and the four of us voted. Just another illustration that my own vote is often *not* the one that is victorious, or

our son Gus would have been named Max instead.

We know how important names are. Many of us have received teasing for some aspect of our name. We may have even changed it along the way, to find a name that we felt really described us. Sometimes our names have family connections we are proud of.... or not. Sometimes they seem to come from nowhere. In the early 70's when I was a preschool teacher, there was a boy in our program who had been born about 1971 who was named "Sunshine" or at least that's what his mother told us. What name does he use now? There are many names that have biblical origins. Sometimes we grow into our names and they come to be part of us and represent deeply who we are.

But no matter what the name, they are most often given as some kind of honor, something our parents value and appreciate. A name they are proud of and they hope we will be too.

In Isaiah 62, we are told that God will give us a new name. Scholars believe that the book of Isaiah is actually the creation of three different writers. The earliest chapters were likely written before the fall of Jerusalem and exile to Babylon. This earlier time was never the less one of upheaval as the people were ruled by four different kings, a time to territorial expansions and wars. After the conquest of Jerusalem by Babylon and the exile of its elite, the people must have been deeply grieved as they were uprooted from the familiar, from what they knew. The second section of chapters in Isaiah were meant to bring the people hope that would keep the people strong and resilient. In the final verses likely written after the return from exile, the message is uplifting and speaks of a promised Messiah who will lead the people into a time of peace and prosperity. Even though the people must still have felt shaken to their very core by the effects of their captivity, they were in desperate need to know who they were and what the future might hold. They were ready for a fresh start.... and a new name.

It is within this context that we hear the words from Isaiah 62: 1-5

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In today's times of a sometimes apparent cultural lack of confidence, when people seem quick to buy the next new thing that might change their bodies, and change their lives, many seem starved for recognition. They don't believe they are anyone's delight. They don't feel like they are enough, just as they are.... they want more or better. At the same time, there are others who experience a lifetime of invisibility. Those with disabilities, the homeless, people of color who live in a predominately white world. Our aged elders who have lost their vitality and their sense of purpose. The young child who struggles in school.... in

relationships. Yes, many long to be seen and known. Frank Somerville tells of An elderly man inside a supermarket who had a very “embarrassing” accident. And was pretty much frozen in fear about what to do next...Until Lisa Lemming Jackson came along.

Hear her tell it - It started with me just smiling at him, making eye contact. As I walked past him he looked like he needed something. I went back and asked him if I could help him.

Tears welled up in his eyes and he said: "I have colon cancer and I have had a really bad accident. If I get up out of this cart everyone will know. What should I do?"

The look of his dignity lost left me with a lump in my throat. From that moment on, Kroger staff quickly fetched us wipes, undergarments and discreetly took him to their employer bathroom Area where he was given clothes.

He cried and apologized. He said he had to hurry his wife was at home alone. When we walked to the register we found his groceries all bagged and somehow paid for. He cried harder.

He said he fought in the Korean and Vietnam Wars and loved his country, but up until that day he said he thought his country forgot about him.

We both cried and I shared with him my own struggles and fears. He gave me words of wisdom and encouraged me saying that maybe, after all, humanity still does care about one another.

She closes by saying, “Thank you Kroger and God for the lesson and reminder I received today.” (From Frank Somerville)

This is graphic and dramatic, but don't we all just want to be seen, to know that we are significant, that we matter... that we are worthy of love and attention. We all want to believe we are someone's good news.... we are someone's delight.... we are God's delight. That day in the grocery store, I hope that man felt like he had been given a new name, “honored hero.”

What a blessing: we are the Delight of God. This is not about arrogance, and “Oh, aren't I special”.... Or yes, “mom always loved me best.”

But it is a call to genuine humility, to coming to believe that I am no better or worse than anyone else. I am one among many, and just like everyone else, I deserve to be seen and known.

“God knit us together in our mother's womb.” God knows us, cherishes us. We want our children to feel this way! Doesn't everyone deserve to be loved unconditionally and completely like this.

John Holbert has said that this text, along with many other prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible, announces a central truth about what it means to be a believer in these challenging times. We all - Christians and Jews and Muslims are cautioned to avoid being cynical about this world given to us by God.

For we all are given a new name by God; we are the "Delight of God," and as such we can live in hope. We could all use this new name from God; it would go far to lead us into new patterns of living, new ways of being in the world that God has bestowed on us.

What brings you immense pleasure and delight? Special people, infants and children, your garden, a project completed, beautiful places, examples of

creativity? We are God's delight.

Very few express wonder and delight better than Mary Oliver, as we hear in her poem "Mindful" -

Every Day
I see or hear
something
that more or less

kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.
It is what I was born for—
to look, to listen,

to lose myself
inside this soft world—
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light

of the world,
the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

Oh, Mary, you bring us such delight!!

And hear again Isaiah's message -
You will be called by a new name
You will be a splendid garland
[a stunning crown in the palm of God's] hand
You shall be called "My Delight"
because God delights in you.

Blessings and peace, my friends.