

Isaiah 62:1-5

January 20, 2013 – EPIPHANY 2, Life Sunday

## New Name + New Life

★ **Out of darkness and desolation (v.1-3)**

✧ **Into the blazing glory of God's righteousness (v.4-5)**

In the name of Christ the true Love of our Life, our heavenly Bridegroom, dear bride of Christ:

A **New Name** means a new existence, a **New Life**, just as a married couple gains all the blessings of each other's families in their new titles of "Mr. and Mrs." When God calls us by His Name in Baptism, we receive God's own family gifts of holiness and redemption. On this side we also must bear the world's hatred as we suffer here with Him. But our eternal inheritance on the other side is all glory along with all who are called out of the **darkness** into His holy light. Imagine how the lonely shepherds felt when God favored them with the first announcement of Jesus' birth and the privilege of kneeling at His manger bed. Their joy was as big as the star-studded sky as they rushed home telling everyone on the way back to their flocks: "A Savior has been born for you! He is Christ the Lord!" This total transformation the Holy Spirit wants for us today in God's gift of a **New Name + New Life**.

★ **Out of darkness and desolation (v.1-3)**

Most Americans do not realize the **darkness and desolation** in the wake of Roe v. Wade, when the US Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. God-fearing folk grieve millions of babies lost. But we also grieve for sad hearts who regret their decisions. Sometimes it's fathers who wish they had tried harder to protect the life of their unborn child. And sometimes it's a mother like one who heard our New Life sermons on our website and called to share her grief. None of us have met her, but she needs our love and our prayers. She's been clean of drugs for many years, yet she grieves for her decision long ago. One hope I have for her and every grieving heart is to know God's grace and forgiveness. "*The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.*" (1 John 1:7 TPA) Abortion too is a sin forgiven.

Look first at the **darkness and desolation** of God's people long ago. At the time of Isaiah (ca. 700 B.C.) the city of Jerusalem was deserted by all her allies. Good King Hezekiah was counting on the Lord to save them from the cruel, heartless Assyrians. Yet he worked to protect the city, commissioning his engineers to build the tunnel that carried water from the Gihon spring into the heart of Jerusalem. This was bold military strategy, empowered by the Gospel which Isaiah kept proclaiming. Through this Good News of God's all-forgiving grace the heart of Israel was kept strong to follow their faithful king. A century later **darkness and desolation** would settle on the city when the Babylonians burned the temple and tore down Jerusalem's wall. A Remnant of believers would return from Captivity to await the coming Messiah. Redemption has come as promised. Physically, emotionally, spiritually God's people will never be forsaken by Jesus Christ who says, "*Surely I am with you all the days to the gathered goal of the ages.*" (Matthew 28:20 TPA) God always keeps His promises no matter how underserving we may be.

*"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. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God."* If a judge declares a chained criminal "Not guilty!" he gets a new set of clothes to replace his convict orange. He is still the same person underneath, but his status has changed. We are still sinners all, but we are sinners forgiven by God and justified by Him. When God looks at a repentant abortionist, He sees only Christ who is our righteousness. God no longer sees the sin, only the perfection of His own dear Son. All of us sinners should take comfort in this truth. Christ is our Substitute in life and in death. His righteousness earns God's verdict for us. In God's justice we are "Not guilty!"

A Lutheran pastor was beginning a Ukrainian mission under “Glasnost” when something terrible happened. The Minister of Education in Ukraine had agreed to put copies of the New Testament into all public schools. Then he was arrested for his non-communist act. But on the day he was to stand trial, a coup was attempted on Soviet Premier Michael Gorbachev. All charges were dropped on the Ukrainian Minister of Education. He was so impressed that he asked the pastor for instructions and became a Christian. Another “king” had come “*to the brightness of your dawn.*” Greater than his government title, he received from God a **New Name + New Life** – redeemed, restored, forgiven. This is the priceless peace God desires for every grief-stricken heart, **From darkness and desolation...**

☆ **Into the blazing glory of God’s righteousness (v.4-5)**

*“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. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”* This was as amazing for Israel as it is for us. You see, God’s people had committed spiritual adultery by worshiping other gods. Yet the LORD kept calling her back like a husband who refused to give up on His unfaithful wife. He’s doing the same for us today. He sees how we get more excited about our TV series and sports, hobbies and relationships than about His Word. By our sins we have divorced ourselves from God daily. Yet He keeps calling us back through prophets like Isaiah here and Jeremiah a century later in the new marriage agreement of the New Covenant:

*“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”* (Jeremiah 31:31–34 NIV84) This is meant for real sinners. God will never recall your sins. You are forgiven.

For husbands and wives we could ask, “How is your marriage these days? Do you still have the love and passion of your wedding night? Do your hearts still beat as one? Or have time and trouble managed to drive a wedge between you? Listen to Isaiah speaking about the God who makes streams flow in the desert. Where God’s love flows, there is **New Life** and a **New Name**. Enemies of God can be lovers again when they live in God’s love poured out on the cross in the wounds of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite descriptions of God’s passionate love for us and what He wants from us and for us in our marriages comes from a model sermon by Dr. Martin Luther. I rarely read to you in my sermons, but here I want at least the English translation as close to Luther’s own words as possible. Singles can come to this warm and inviting spot for your own heart’s rest. And married couples can worship the Lord together while He renews His love in your hearts and lives.

“For there are many kinds of love, but none is so ardent and fervent as a bride’s love, the love a new bride has to her bridegroom, and on the other hand, the bridegroom’s love to the bride. True love has no regard for pleasures or presents, or riches, or gold rings and the like; but cares only for the bridegroom. And if he even gave her all he had, she would regard none of his presents, but say: I will have only thee. And if on the other hand he has nothing at all, it makes no difference with her, she will in spite of all that desire him. That is the true nature of the love of a bride....

14. “This true bride-love God presented to us in Christ, in that he allowed him to become man for us and be united with our human nature that we might thus perceive and appreciate his good will toward us. Now as the bride loves her betrothed, so also does Christ love us; and we on the other hand will love him, if we believe and are the true bride.... The bride can be satisfied by nothing, is insatiable,

[except for] the bridegroom himself; as she says in the Song of Solomon, 2,16: ‘My beloved is mine, and I am his.’ She cannot rest until she has her beloved himself. So is Christ also on the other hand disposed toward me: he will have me only, and besides nothing. And if I gave him even all I could, it would be of no use to him.... He wants my whole heart.... He demands, that I say from the bottom of my heart: I am yours. The union and the marriage are accomplished by faith, so that I rely fully and freely upon him, that is mine. If I only have him, what can I desire more?

15. “...What does he give us then? Himself, wholly and completely. He does not cut a piece off for me or give me a little morsel, but the whole fountain of eternal wisdom, not a little brooklet.... If he gave me only a part of his wisdom, righteousness and life, I would say: That is of no help to me, but I want you, *without you nothing is real and true*....

16. “Now, what do we bring to him? Nothing but all our heart-aches, all our misfortunes, sins, misery and lamentations. He is the eternal light, we the eternal darkness; he the life, we death; he righteousness, we sin. This is a marriage that is very unequal. But what does the bridegroom do? He is so [particular] that he will not dwell with his bride until he first adorns her in the highest degree. How is that done? The Apostle Paul teaches that when he says in Tit. 3,5-7: ‘He gave his tender body unto death for them through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.’ He instituted a washing; that washing is baptism, with which he washes her. More than this, he has given to her his Word; in that she believes and through her faith she becomes a bride. The bridegroom comes with all his treasures; but I come with all my sins, with all my misery and heart-griefs. But because this is a marriage and a union, in the sense that they become one flesh, Gen. 2,24; Mat. 19,5, and they leave father and mother and cleave to one another, they should embrace each other and not disown one another, although one is even a little sick and awkward; for what concerns one, the other must also bear.

17. “...Therefore my death thus vanishes in his life, my sins in his righteousness and my condemnation in his salvation.... For now since my sin, my filth is taken away he must adorn and clothe me with his eternal righteousness and with all his grace until I become beautiful; for I am his bride....”<sup>1</sup>

To every grieving heart, we can say without exception, “Our dear Savior wants you as His own. He laid down His life to win your heart. Look at the hands Jesus holds out to you today. The scars are still there from the nails when He washed your sins away with His holy, precious blood. But don’t forget. Before Jesus died in your place, He also lived in your place. God says He credits Jesus’ perfect, holy life to you. All the merit you need before God is already in heaven’s bank. Let Jesus Christ slip His wedding ring on your finger today. Even if you took it off for a while, Jesus wants you back. Let all your sorrow disappear in His holy joy to hold you close and tender. That is the love of the heavenly Bridegroom for you. He wants to take you home **To the blazing glory of God’s righteousness**. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Sermons of Martin Luther*, a.k.a. “Luther’s Postil.” John Nicholas Lenker, ed. TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, Matthew 22:1-14. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, re-printed 1988, Vol. V, pp.231-234. Some words were updated for this sermon. [M.C. 1/19/2013]

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