

# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### A New Name for a New Year

#### Isaiah 62:1-5

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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.

Do you like your name? Do you know why your parents chose that name for you? Did it have a special meaning or did it just sound nice? In the Bible, we see again and again that a person's name can be very meaningful. Think of Isaac. His name meant laughter. It was a reminder to his mother of how she first laughed incredulously at God's promise that she would have a child in her old age and then laughed joyfully when God carried through on his promise and gave her a son. Of course, the name Jesus is certainly meaningful. His name means Savior and that's exactly what he came to this earth to do—save his people from their sins. In our Old Testament today we hear how God has given his children some very special names. As you think about the new name that God has given to you, you realize that you have a reason to rejoice every day no matter what the circumstances of your life might be.

Our reading comes from the second half of Isaiah's prophecy. This is the part of Isaiah's prophecy which is intended for the captives who are living in Babylon. The first half of his prophecy shows the Israelites why they are living in captivity in the first place. They had been unfaithful to their faithful God. God had been nothing but good and gracious to them throughout their history and they responded with wickedness and stubborn rebellion. For this reason, God used a foreign army to bring his wrath upon this wicked people. They lost their independence. They lost their homeland. They felt the severe consequences for their sinful thoughts and actions. In this miserable state, their name could very well have been Deserted or Desolate. That is what it looked like. It looked like their God had deserted them and left them to suffer all on their own.

God, however, wanted them to know that this was not the case. Their punishment was actually loving discipline. He had led them to the valleys of sorrow, but he would also lead them to the mountains of joy. He had not deserted them. He had not abandoned them. He still had a plan for them and it was a very good plan. The second half of Isaiah's prophecy lays out that beautiful plan of the Lord to send a Savior who would restore his people and make them glorious once again. Our reading today begins with the Lord wanting to make that truth known to his people. He says: *"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."*

Have you ever been in a situation where you really needed to hear that the Lord has not abandoned you? Maybe you know what it means to be chastised by the Lord like the Israelites experienced. Maybe you have had to suffer the consequences of sinful decisions in your life and they have not been pleasant. On the other hand, you might also know the suffering that is not a result of your own sinful words and actions. The Lord may have brought a cross into your life of pain and sorrow and there seems to be no reason for it at all.

During these times, you might be tempted to think your name is Desolate or Deserted. You might be tempted to think that God has abandoned you or that his plan for your life has failed. Such thinking is foolish. Not only is self pity a destructive emotion when it comes to your psychological well being, doubting God's goodness and his plan can be a sign of our weakness of faith. At times like these, we need to hear God's Word and find comfort and encouragement in his gospel promises.

If you are in need of a spiritual pick-me-up, there is perhaps no better place to turn than these verses from Isaiah 65. It speaks of the church as God's prized possession. The Lord says, "*You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.*" I doubt any of you have ever possessed a crown filled with jewels. But if you did, you would probably think it is very special. On the one hand, you would want to guard it to make sure it is safe. On the other hand, you would want to show it off, so others could see the beautiful crown you own. As the Lord's crown, he does both of those things with us. He guards us and protects us and he shows us off to bring him glory.

You might wonder why the Lord would want to show you off. You think of the many sins in your life. You think of how you have brought his name dishonor by your shameful thoughts and actions. How could you bring glory to God? That's the thing. It's not about you. It's about what the Lord has done for you. He has won your salvation by sending his only-begotten Son to be your Savior. He has washed your sins clean through the blood of his Son. He has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature. The fact that you are a member of his church is a testament to his wonderful grace. He doesn't see you as worthless or rejected. He sees you as a soul which was worth the blood of his one and only Son. You are a prized possession of his. Yes, he does want the whole world to see you and, in the process, see his glorious grace at work.

If you still had any doubts about your value in God's eyes, he gives you a new name as a reminder of just how loved and valued you are. Isaiah prophesied: "*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.<sup>5</sup> 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.*" God uses a very beautiful picture here to illustrate his great love for his people.

Those of you who are married can probably recall some of the emotions you felt on your wedding day. Think of the time when you stood before God and made your vows to each other. Men, what was going through your mind? You probably looked at your wife and thought: "Hephzibah!"

Maybe that wasn't the exact word that you were thinking, but the sentiment was there. You looked at your beautiful bride and you thought to yourself: "She's perfect. I love her so much." That's "Hephzibah." Ladies, what was going through your mind as you looked into your husband's eyes on your wedding day? You probably thought, "I've got a lot of work to do with this one..." No, that wasn't what you were thinking. As you looked into your husband's eyes and he promised that he would love you no matter what, for better or for worse, till death do you part, you thought, "I am safe and secure in his love."

Unfortunately, we know that in earthly marriages, those vows are not always kept. All marriages are between two sinful human beings. Spouses let us down. We let ourselves down in the way we treat our spouses. That is what makes this vision of God's love for us all the more beautiful. We know that God will never fail in keeping his promises. When he calls us his bride and says we are his delight, we can be confident that he will always love us in that special and amazing way. We are Hephzibah. We are Beulah. That is a name that should bring us joy every time we think about it.

These verses of Scripture are all about encouragement. Don't despair no matter what circumstances of life you find yourselves in. God has a plan for you. And it is a good plan. You are his special possession. He is there to love you, forgive you, and guide you throughout your life. This new year, remember your new name every day and rejoice in the love of your saving God. **Amen.**

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Sermon No. 252  
January 17, 2009  
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