

“Caring and Sharing” - Isaiah 62.1-12 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

One of the things we can glean from this passage from the prophet Isaiah is that God cares for the Least, the Last and the Lost. In this new year, how might we learn to look for those who are hurting and think of ways we can be helpful. We can be instruments of God’s “Caring and Sharing.”

Did you have to study Shakespeare’s plays in English class? Did you have one of those teachers who expected you to memorize some lines? What ones do you remember? Do you remember this quote from “Romeo and Juliet”? *“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”* Juliet asks the famous question because of a family feud divided by family names. (Can anyone remember their family names?) What nicknames are you or have you been known by? Do you feel like they describe you well? Some can be put down like “Butterfingers” or “Fatty!” But think about it. If you could be given a nickname that would then transform who you are or what you can do, what nickname would you want? In this new year I am looking to live into the nickname “Grandpa Jeff!”

Look at what is said here about Jerusalem in verse 4:

*You will no longer be called Abandoned,
and your land will no longer be called Deserted.
Instead, you will be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land, Married.
Because the Lord delights in you,
your land will be cared for once again.*

Abandoned and Deserted were not good nicknames but identified the situation. So, let’s get a little context to this text. The city of Jerusalem was established and built as the capital city by King David roughly 1000 BC. And then its destruction by the Babylonians happened in 586 BC. Chapters 1-39 of Isaiah tell of a time before the destruction, chapters 40-55 about the time people were in exile in Babylonia, and chapters 56-66 including these verses after the return of the exiles seventy years later.

In essence you had a hey-day during the 80 years David and his son Solomon ruled. Then the kingdom was divided north and south and the divided kingdoms were each defeated. Israel in the north by the Assyrians and then later Judah to the south (including Jerusalem) by the Babylonians.

In our reading today, we see how the people of Israel experienced the bad times before the good times. They felt abandoned by God and deserted by God who no longer kept them safe from their enemies. For them, their defeat caused a theological crisis of faith. How could their omnipotent, all-powerful God be defeated? Well, only if God deserted them or abandoned them, they reasoned. And how could their faithful God be so unfaithful? If they had sinned! (The prophet Job will ultimately help the people to understand that bad things do happen to good people.)

Today I want us to see that the prophet offers a couple hopeful new nicknames as the prophet sees the city and nation rebuilt. *My Delight Is in Her*, and *Married* sound much different, don’t they? An ancient theology of God being with the people and then abandoning and deserting them and then being reunited with them is the undertone here. And look at the nicknames in verse 12: *The Holy People, Redeemed by the Lord and Sought After - A City That Is Not Abandoned.*

Did you know the early Methodists had a nickname? It was “Methodists” a derogatory word that other students at Oxford used for John and Charles Wesley and others who met together for Bible study and prayer and worked together to help the poor – they were methodical in living out their Christian life. As time went on they began calling themselves that and living into the methodology of their faith that we still practice today. Jesus gave Simon a nickname – Peter – the Rock! And as disciples of Jesus we are given a new nickname – Christian. *So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”* (Acts 11:26) That can be a name we grow into. Do you know the hymn, Lord, I want to Be a Christian, in my heart? It talks about being more loving and being more holy and being like Jesus, in my heart. Might we grow up to be that way! May we methodically live up to that name.

Each day this week pray and live into the Serenity Prayer: *Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

One last thought, like ancient Jerusalem, are there communities or neighborhoods around here that seem to have been abandoned, forsaken or forgotten? Are there people or groups of people that are forsaken or forgotten? What can the church, or a group of churches together, do to remember those whom others have forgotten? What can we do to make a difference to communities and people as we help them live into a new nickname? To be blessed. To become God’s people. To become God’s delight! Talk about making disciples for the transformation of the world! Alleluia and Amen.

As We Go Anywhere on Earth

Jeffrey B. Childs 2/11/2025

(Tune: McKee UMH 548)

As we go anywhere on earth,
Might we show love and care,
And reveal each has sacred worth,
And with them good news share.

It hasn't always been that way,
There have been wars and strife,
When people fought both night and day,
Threatening limb and life.

But we can make a difference here,
For God has so decreed.
We can bring Christ to those in fear,
And also those in need.