

"The Lord's Delight"

Isaiah 62:1-5

January 17, 2016

2nd Sunday After the Epiphany

You've probably seen those "bride shows" on television. (I only see them as a flip through the channels on to a different show.) The shows try to show what a perfect bride should be – a beautiful face, lovely body, white gleaming teeth, an astounding wedding dress, and stunning jewelry – and what every bride should emulate. Instead of depressing those who watch such shows, people evidently delight in watching these kinds of shows since there are so many of them, it seems. Even if such shows create such unrealistic expectations, many young women are happy to watch them and dream of their wedding experience being the same as they see on television.

The value and expectations of brides and brides-to-be are not the only place where we have unrealistic expectations and mistaken values. We tend to judge and value people in the same way brides are judged on those bride shows: by their outward appearances and by our cultural expectations. We tend to value those who are wealthy or those who have many possessions. We enjoy the important people – those who are popular or pretty. On this Life Sunday, we are reminded that our culture tends to accept those people (and only those people) who are wanted and don't inconvenience us; people who are healthy and don't put an unnecessary and useless drain on medical resources; people who can contribute to society and don't weaken society. We like those kinds of people

Of course, there are many people who are not like that. We have poor people and immoral people. There are the nerds and the geeks and whatever other terminology these days is used to describe those people who are neither popular nor pretty. There are problem pregnancies and unwanted babies; ill and dying people hooked to machines; people who are no longer productive and useful members of society. It's hard for us to like those kinds of people.

What about the Lord? What kind of people does He like? In whom does He delight? Our text today uses the metaphor of a bridegroom's attitude toward his bride to help us understand God's

attitude toward people. There is great joy at a wedding over the relationship between a bridegroom and his bride. It is natural for a bridegroom to not only like, but love his bride. He rejoices to have her as his wife. He delights in being with her.

But suppose the bride is not as perfect in beauty, in dress, or in adornment as the women on those bride shows are depicted. Worse yet, suppose the bride has been unfaithful to her groom – not returning his love, not doing what pleases him and sleeping around with other guys. Would there still be love, joy, and delight on behalf of the groom for his bride?

This describes the situation between God and His people in our Old Testament lesson for today. Israel had not been the perfect bride for the Lord, her groom. She had been more like a shamed promiscuous woman – a prostitute, if you will. She had abandoned her Lord to run after the false gods of her neighbors and worship them. Instead of doing what was right and pleasing to the Lord, Israel did what was proclaimed to be right and good by her culture. Israel did not return her Lord's love, but, rather, loved the things of this world. According to the text, Israel was known as Forsaken and Desolate. It wasn't a pretty sight.

As the New Testament people of God, have we not often repeated Israel's mistake? Do we not also run after the gods of our neighbors – money, possessions, sports, pleasure, and even self? These examples may not appear to be religious in nature, but we worship and value them (often religiously) still the same.

Do we not allow culture to determine what we do rather than the commands of the Lord? A day like Life Sunday reminds us of this. God says, "You shall not kill." But our culture today says that some killing is all right; that the unborn are choices, not children and therefore may be terminated; that euthanasia – the killing of the aged or terminally ill – allows people to die with dignity, rather than shame; and that the right to kill one's self asserts autonomy and not dependency. Many churches have bought into these cultural commands, this moral relativism and use them to determine their behavior, rather than the Word of God. Even though we as a church body and as individuals have not bought into these specific examples, there are still countless times where we have allowed

the culture to determine our priorities, our choices, and our behavior. Sometimes we do this, while ignorant of God's will, but I know of many examples where people follow the culture while being fully aware of God's will and not caring.

It all boils down to a lack of interest in God's love and a greater interest in self love. Parents know that true love for their children means restricting their options and disciplining their behavior at times. God's love is the same. In our love of self, we want to be free to choose any option that pleases us without any restriction or consequence. In our world, it's all about me and what I want.

If you were God, the bridegroom, would you want to be married to a bride like us? Many human marriages today break up over far less serious offenses. Yet despite our idolatry, our disobedience, our self-centeredness, the Lord desires to be married – that is, to make a life-long commitment of love – to you and me.

It's simply amazing what our text describes! Instead of being angry at us and rejecting us as we deserve and which no one would blame Him for, the Lord is fairly giddy to have us. He just can't keep quiet about what He has done for Zion and what He will do for them. He's like a kid who buys his first Christmas gift for his mother and father. He can't even wait for them to open the gift. Instead, he blurts out what it is as they are opening it.

The Lord can't bear to be silent to Zion and to Jerusalem "until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch." She will be a royal crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord. She will have a new name "My Delight is in Her" and "Married." How can He say this of someone as utterly sinful as Zion? How did they become so righteous and beautiful? What did they do?

They did nothing. They have a righteousness given to them and not earned by them. They have a salvation sent to them and not accomplished by them. They have all of this done for them by the One sent by the Lord and not done by themselves.

This is the great joy of Epiphany which we, His New Testament people experience, too. God has sent forth His Son, Jesus, to be the Savior of the world; to bring His righteousness to His people

where there has been evil and sin: idolatry, disobedience, and self-centeredness. He comes to bring life in heaven where there has been death on earth. Now, the Lord can't keep quiet. He is bursting with the news. He wants the entire world to know what He has done and is doing.

St. Paul uses the marriage metaphor to describe this. He writes, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27)

The Baby of Bethlehem and the Savior of Epiphany loved us with an undying love. He took our sin, unrighteousness, and damnation upon Himself to a cross and gave up His life that He might give us His holiness, His righteousness, and His salvation. He has cleansed us through the washing of water with the word – Holy Baptism – so that we have no spots or wrinkles, but are holy and without blemish in our Father's eyes.

This means that the Lord, not only accepts you and saves you, but He delights in you and rejoices over you, much like a bridegroom rejoices over his perfect bride. And that is what you are: the perfect bride. It is not because you have spoken perfectly, thought perfectly, or acted perfectly. It is because the perfect groom has given you His holiness so that the Father might declare you to be holy.

The Lord not only rejoices over you and delights in you, but all who share in His salvation. He rejoices to save the poor, the homeless, the physically unattractive, the unpopular, those whom we might overlook or reject. The Lord delights in the child in the womb, the elderly person in the nursing home, the dying person in hospice.

Since the Lord rejoices over such people and delights in such people, it is incumbent upon His bride, the Church, to rejoice over and delight in such people, as well. This is why churches reach out to share the Gospel and meet the needs of its community. This is why churches become involved in life issues and why groups like *Lutherans For Life* exist. It is not just to be nice guys and help people or increase the number of members the church has. It's not to win the culture wars or make a

political or theological point. Rather, we rejoice over those whom the Lord rejoices and we delight in those in whom the Lord delights. And we let our joy and delight show in how we act and in how we live.

So, delight in the Lord as He delights in you. Rejoice in the Lord as He rejoices over you like a bridegroom rejoices over his bride. And, as His bride, wait with eagerness and anticipation for His delight and joy to be made complete in you at “the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which as no end.” Amen.