

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA
✠ Second Sunday after the Epiphany ✠
January 14, 2007

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

"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. ² 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. ³ You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴ 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. ⁵ 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."
(Isaiah 62:1-5)

They had hoped that the wedding would go off without a hitch, and thanks to Jesus, it did. When the wine ran out at the wedding at Cana, it could have meant a big embarrassment for the families and the master of the banquet. But Jesus saved the day by performing his first recorded miracle and changing water into wine.

But I think that you could safely say that Jesus is not as concerned about weddings going smoothly as he is concerned about marriages. Jesus cares about marriage because God cares about marriage. He showed that by establishing marriage almost immediately after creating man and woman. He shows that by all the passages in the Bible where he talks about and to husbands and wives. (We'll be talking about one such section in Bible Class today.) But perhaps one of the most beautiful Bible passages on marriage is that one in Paul's letter to the Ephesians where Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives. But you know, that section is not just for people with a ring on their finger—not just for husbands and wives but especially for a group of people called the bride of Christ. Listen: **"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."**

Of course, Ephesians is not the only place in the Bible that talks like this. Especially the Old Testament is filled with this kind of picture language. God treats his people like a bride. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom who loves his bride. That is, he loves you. You, people who call Jesus Christ your Savior are the bride of Christ. What Jesus did for his church; what Jesus continues to do for his church, he does for you. And he has something he wants to say to you. And it's as valuable and applicable to us as it was to Isaiah's original audience, for we too are the bride of Christ, and to us he says, "Rejoice." **REJOICE BECAUSE OF HOW HE HAS CLOTHED YOU AND REJOICE BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS CALLED YOU.**

Now usually, a bride-to-be is much more involved in wedding planning than her fiancé. I know there are exceptions, but the bride is usually the one who might spend months looking and shopping for just the right dress, or picking out the right piece of jewelry to wear, or deciding

how she'll have her hair done—and about a million other details for her wedding day. And when the day finally comes, and she walks down the aisle, everyone will notice how beautiful she looks.

But in our text for today it's not the bride who is making herself beautiful, it's the Lord himself. **“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;”** For the sake of his people, God will not stop working and speaking until his people are dressed in such a way that their righteousness shines.

But the problem is, they have no righteousness. Whether he's talking about believers in Jerusalem in 700 BC or this group of people gathered in 2007, these people have no righteousness of their own to wear. If you're not convinced, then just take a look into the mirror. Even if you just look at a little portion of the mirror of God's law (say, the sixth commandment, since we're talking about marriage) and just think about how times words came from your mouth or thoughts remained in your head that didn't exactly reflect the way God designed and blessed marriage. We would have to confess that we wouldn't make a very beautiful bride. Both our sinful nature and the actual sins we commit from day to day are the clothes we have on by nature. They're like rags—dirty rags. We have no business having anything to do with God; much less being called his bride.

But “rejoice,” because he will not stop until that is what we are. He will not stop until we are **“a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”** To make us into his most precious crown, his pride and joy, he has clothed us. The righteousness that we wear is not ours but it's his. In the previous chapter, Isaiah writes, **“He has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”**

You see, he clothes us in righteousness every time we hear the good news of the salvation he won for us. Every time we see his righteousness, his perfect life and his innocent death, he dresses us in his perfection. When we taste his body and his blood, he adorns us with the most dazzling of jewels—his love and salvation. Rejoice, bride of Christ, every time you get the opportunity to be with him and listen to him.

I think that marriage must require a greater level of adjustment for a bride than for the groom—for one simple reason. Usually the bride changes her name. I couldn't even imagine that. You go through 20 or more years of life with one name and then suddenly you're signature changes.

But I believe this custom does help us to understand what our bridegroom has done for us. He gives us a new name. Isaiah writes, **“You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.”** But this new name is much more significant than going from “Smith” to “Jones.” This name is coming from the very mouth of the Lord. Our new name is coming from the same mouth that spoke and created the heavens and the earth. It's coming from the mouth of the Lord who spoke through prophets; who through his angel announced that his Son would have the name Jesus because we will save his people from their sins. When God speaks, what he says comes true. When God names someone, that is what they are.

That is what they are despite the way things might look and despite what other people might call them. Jerusalem had that problem. It was called “Deserted” and “Desolate.” And you could understand why someone might say that. Isaiah prophesied that Judah's enemies would come in and remove the inhabitants of Judah and take them into exile in Babylon. And anyone who

looked at them during those years could have said, "It's empty. The people are gone and with them went the promises God made to them. There's nothing left—just an abandoned city."

But you know, that's really the way God's people always look. They look like they're all alone. They worship and pray to a God they cannot see. They give gifts and they serve a God who appears to be silent and absent. They don't usually get wealthy and they're not always healthy. They look like a woman who says she's married, but you never see her husband. She looks like she's been abandoned. "Oh, he'll come back," she says, "he said he would." So they call her Deserted and Desolate, and after a while she begins to believe it, too.

We may very easily be tempted to think that the troubles which come into our life are signs that God has left us. We may think that our seemingly unanswered prayers are really going unheard. We think maybe God doesn't hear because of something we've done. Maybe we are what they say.

But listen to the voice of your bridegroom. He calls to you and gives you a new name: He calls you "Hephzibah," which means "my delight is in her." He calls you "Beulah," which means "married." He tells you that he is not angry with you or ignoring you, he delights in you—happier than a groom on his wedding day. And you are married. The word in Hebrew for "marry" describes what happens when a couple got married. The husband, in a sense, took possession of the wife, that is, he began to live with her and was united to her. So when it says that your sons will marry you, Isaiah reminds his readers that God's relationship with his bride will not end in one generation but will continue and Zion's descendants will also take possession of the land—they too will live as his bride.

No matter how things may seem to others or to you, you can rejoice in the name God has given to you—He delights in you, he rejoices over you; he treats you like his precious bride. He even unites himself to you and lives with you as he comes in his Word.

Many people who are married remember their wedding day fondly. Perhaps a husband remembers watching his beautiful bride walking down the aisle towards him. Perhaps the wife remembers their walk back down the aisle, their first as husband and wife. For many people, those memories are enough to bring a smile to their face—even years later.

Again and again in Scripture we are reminded of the relationship that our God has established with us in our bridegroom, Christ Jesus. And those reminders are meant to bring us joy—year after year. Some years are better than others, but at all times our bridegroom has something he wants to say to us: Rejoice. Rejoice that he has clothed in the robe of his righteousness. Rejoice because he has given you a new name, that is really what you are.