

In Whom God Delights
January 20, 2019: The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
[Isaiah 62:1-5](#); [Psalm 36:5-10](#)

My sister and I were talking yesterday as we huddled in my kitchen trying to keep warm and entertain ourselves--and more importantly, my little boys--on that cold, snowy day. We decided to make gingerbread cookies, and while the boys were working with the dough and cutting out their shapes, my sister and I started to talk about deep things. Now, you know what I do for a living, and my sister is a yoga teacher and is studying yoga therapy, so she as well finds herself thinking about and dwelling in really deep things, and practical things, all at the same time.

Sitting there in my kitchen, she said [paraphrased] "I've been wondering, how can both of these things be true: I know that I am not enough. In my daily work running my business, teaching in my yoga studio, and trying to improve myself through my studies, I know every day that I am not enough; I know all the things I don't get to; I am so aware when I am weak where I want to be strong." As she spoke, I thought of the singer Nico's song "These Days" when she sings, "Don't remind me of my failures; I have not forgotten them."

My sister continued [paraphrased again], "How can this be true, and at the same time, it be true that I know that I *am* enough and I always have been in God's eyes? How can I know that I am *not* enough, and that I *am* enough? How can it be true that I am weak and limited in my love for those around me, and at the same time know that I am loved by God and that God's love is bigger than anything I can imagine? How can it be that I am *not* okay in my weakness and limitations, and that I am so okay in God's greatness and care for us? How can both of these things be true?" All of this as we were supervising little boys making gingerbread cookies.

How, indeed, can both of these things be true?

The prophet Isaiah, from whom we get to hear again today and so often in this season spanning Advent through Epiphanytide, is speaking to his people amidst dramatic, world-shattering unrest; to people not acquainted with peace, with okayness, with enoughness, both personally and collectively, yet a people whose radical faith in the one God--not in a set of capricious gods and goddesses of their culture, but the *one* God--who created them, who created us, and who holds all of us in love tells them that in *some* way, things *are* okay.

Isaiah casts this juxtaposition, this tension, between okayness and not-okayness in the imagery of a wedding, of God pursuing the people Israel as a groom pursues a bride. In that culture, a woman who was not married was in peril, basically, for in that culture an unmarried woman had no power to fend or provide for herself financially, legally, or socially. In comparing the people Israel to an unmarried woman, those Israelites would have known exactly what Isaiah was talking about as they, in exile, would have felt powerless, helpless, hopeless. This is how Isaiah's vision is so powerful for them, because in it, her prospects are reframed.

Israel's name will become "Married"; Israel's name will become "The One in Whom God Delights". God promises to take her back, to turn to her again, and again, not only on the day of their wedding but on every single day of their marriage; through thick and thin, for better, for worse. God promises to turn to Israel--and to us--every day in tender love.

For their community, "struggling in conflict over how to rebuild [their] city walls, how to rebuild [their] temple," how to manage and experience their grief about losing the temple; for this community

struggling with how to “govern themselves, how to decide who belongs to them”--do any of these questions sound familiar to us today?--this poem of love becomes an epiphany in itself, revealing God in their very midst, “defending, protecting, and insisting upon their special beauty.”¹ What good news is that?!

Israel, in Isaiah’s words, has felt “Forsaken” and “Desolate”. What they have known and expected in their lives has come to naught, has been destroyed and utterly disrupted. “Where is God?” they have cried. Isaiah proclaims that God is always turning back to them, choosing them, seeing them as beautiful, standing beside them at the altar and every day, holding their hand. God is telling them that they are “chosen, singled out, [and] selected from all the earth’s people as God’s beloved bride”² or groom, or partner, or spouse. Whatever word is true for you, God loves *you*. God is in it for the long haul with *you*.

God calls *you* by name--a new name, one that sounds new to your ears yet actually has been true since before you were formed in the womb. Both new and not-new is your name. Your name is “God’s delight”. And your name is “God’s delight”. And your name is “God’s delight”. You shine in God’s eyes and there is nowhere you could go, there is no way you could flee from God’s love.

Do you believe this to be true? I know for me, it’s both wonderful and difficult to receive God’s love. They are words I so hunger to hear, yet don’t know where to put. There’s something in me that wants to resist them, that wants to cry back out to God, “No, I am *not* enough! You must have this wrong.”

Moreover, how do we insist upon the special beauty of others? Do we see others as “Forsaken”? Do we name others as “Desolate”? And when we do, do we close the door behind them, because it might be easier that way? Do we name others as “Forsaken” and “Desolate” and, unlike the prophets before us, keep silent?

Or, following Isaiah and Martin Luther King, Junior, do we refuse to keep silent, until each and every one in whom God delights shines like the sun? Do we, like the prophets before us, still have a dream that one day no one will be judged by the color of their skin or the country where they were born or the circumstances of their family? Do we act like it? Do we love like it?

¹ Kathleen O’Connor, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume I*, p. 247

² *Ibid.*