

Isaiah 62:1-5    2 Epiphany    1.16.25    Bill Uetricht

I...will...not...keep...silent. For Gaza's sake, I will not keep silent. For Ukraine's sake, I will not keep silent. For the outskirts of Los Angeles, I will not remain silent. I will not rest until their vindication shines out like the dawn, and their salvation like a burning torch. It will not be possible to shut me up. I will talk and keep on talking, proclaim and keep on proclaiming, preach and keep on preaching. I will shake the skies with my voice. I will not pause. I will not rest, for the sake of the precious lands that God loved and appeared to have left. And I will keep on keeping on until every nation can see that Gaza and Ukraine and Los Angeles have been declared innocent and lifted up to a place of honor and glory.

That, for me, is the effect of our reading from Isaiah today. The subject is the city of Jerusalem, a city brought to ruins by an imperial power, the Babylonians. Cyrus and his people now are running the show. They are inviting the Jewish exiles to come back to Jerusalem. In fact, they are even willing to throw in a little money to rebuild the temple. Things are looking up. But let's be honest. Jerusalem is still a mess. The exiles may be coming back to town, but the town is a devastated heap of destruction and garbage.

But Jerusalem has a fan, a spokesperson, one who will not give up on it. Some people see the fan as God, and that makes some sense for me. But today I am viewing that fan as the prophet. Call him Isaiah, if you wish. For me, Isaiah is advocating to God on behalf of the city he loves. He is reminding God of what Jerusalem can become. He is reminding God of what God has promised for this great place. It's almost as if Isaiah is saying, "God, don't forget; don't forget your love for the holy city. And by the way, it feels like you have. But I am not going to let you forget. I...will...not...keep...silent.

I will not keep silent until Jerusalem is a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. I will not keep silent until one who is labeled “forsaken” and “desolate” is named “My delight is in her” and your land “Married.” Jerusalem is going to be called by a new name.

“I got a new name over in glory, and it’s mine, mine, mine. I got a new name over in glory, and it’s mine, mine, mine.”

A new name is not a matter of Chuck to Charles or Bill to William because, well, one sounds more formal than the other, or one just goes better with Uetricht or with Williams. No, a new name means a new identity. For Biblical writers, names have power. They connect us to what our lives mean and what God is doing in and through them. Jerusalem has a new name, and it is a name that grants hope. The prophet won’t give up on the city.

I love what John Holbert says in relationship to this wonderful text from Isaiah: “To be a Christian and to be a cynic is nothing less than an oxymoron.” To be Christian is to be people of hope. And honestly, that is hard these days. Gaza looks like a mess. Ukraine looks like a mess. Parts of California look like a mess. Our political system seems broken. Narcissism is rampant. Despair seems omnipresent. Suicide rates are at an all-time high. Climate change is bringing us disaster after disaster. Our kids are learning too much about life too fast. Technologies that have promised us utopia are giving us everything but utopia. Cynicism seems to be the right choice. And I understand why some might choose it. But hope is our gift. Hope is our song. Hope is our habitat.

I . . . will . . . not . . . keep . . . silent until the hope that we trust gives way to a transformed world. I suspect that Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday we celebrate this weekend, felt the same way about his calling. This prophet of truth and hope would not give up,

even if his prophetic speech would bring about his death, which it did. Just two months before he was murdered, King in a speech in Washington D.C. said, “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” And King, in a lecture series in 1967, claimed: “If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps you moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream.” King still spoke, and he would not remain silent until the dream was fulfilled.

You know, I wonder what gave the Israelites, what gave the prophet Isaiah the hope that drove him and them? Was it that hope just springs eternal? Was it a never-dying optimism that just wouldn't give into the facts on the ground? Perhaps. Humans may be wired for hope. But when it comes to Israel and to Isaiah, I suspect that memory, corporate memory fed their orientation toward hope. You'll notice that Israel in the Bible is always remembering—remembering the forefathers and the foremothers, remembering the time when they were freed from the hands of the Egyptians, remembering the creation of all that is. As they looked to the future they remembered the gifts of the past. And they concluded that in their God there was steadfast love, faithfulness, mercy and grace that were true from the beginning. Listen to our Psalm for today:

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the clouds.  
How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
They feast on the abundance of your house, and  
you give them drink from the river of your delights.

The Israelites remembered; they looked around at the present, and they sensed the provision of God. In their God, they knew

abundance. They faced the future by clinging to God's abundance that they had encountered in the past.

I . . . will . . . not . . . keep . . . silent until all know and experience the abundance of God. The abundance of God is the bottom-line truth of our faith. In God, there is not scarcity; there is abundance. There is an abundance of love, grace, and forgiveness. I will not keep silent until all know that and trust that, because what they often know and trust is scarcity. In Bible study on Wednesday night, Bert Goodman, after I said something similar to that said, "Do you remember the toilet paper shortage during COVID?" Yes, I do. We were driven by scarcity. So what did we do? We ran out and bought more toilet paper, which only served to increase the scarcity and raise the price.

I think it is phenomenally profound that one of the first consequences of human sin in Genesis is sibling rivalry. After Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and after they give birth to two children, the boys start fighting with each other. Eventually one kills the other. Why? Because they couldn't imagine that there was enough love to go around for the both of them. The other was a threat because, well, you know, there is only so much to go around. I have to get rid of the other so that I can have my piece of the pie.

I will not keep silent until we understand that this is not how life operates in the realm of God. In God, there is more than enough to go around, which is the truth of the story of the wedding at Cana. Jesus and his mom have been invited to a wedding. The party throwers must have been not so good at throwing parties or more people showed up than were anticipated. They ran out of wine. But that isn't a problem when Jesus is involved because in him there is always more than enough.

Jesus takes the 120-150 gallons of water that were sitting in six massive stone vessels jars and turns that water into wine. And all of a sudden, there are 120-150 gallons of wine. Whoa! This is some party!

We hosted a party last Friday at our home at which a pastor from Sparta brought bottle after bottle of wine that he made. There seemed to be a never-ending supply. But trust me. There weren't 120-150 gallons. In Jesus, there is abundance. There is more than enough. In fact, as John will tell us in the next chapter of his story, there is more than enough for the whole world, for God so loved the *world* that he gave his only son.

I will not keep silent until we hear of and trust that abundance living in the hope that such abundance brings—hope for Gaza, Ukraine, California, everybody and every place.