

Sermon: 2019/01/20 (2nd Sunday after Epiphany - Baptism of Our Lord, Year C), *Isaiah 62:1-5* and, *John 2:1-11*_BTR

[Invite children to the front.]

'On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus' - Mary! - 'was there. [And] Jesus and His disciples...also'.

On the third day.

Hm!

What does that make you think of?

On the third day.

Is there another event - another episode in the life of Jesus - *or elsewhere in the Bible* - that that reminds you of?

On the third day.

[Wait for response.]

Ok, let me tell you:

In (the Book of) *Exodus* (in the Old Testament), Moses - one of God's heroes - took a walk up a *tall(!)* Mountain called Horeb to see God, and God told him 'on the third day' I will show myself to the people and its gonna be *spectacular*: there will be loud trumpets and thunder and lightning and fire and smoke and then they'll really know: "I AM the Lord."

And that's what happened.

God *proved* He existed and was in charge of all nature. [See: Ex. 19]

And, in the gospels - *Matthew, Mark, Luke* and *John* - Jesus did the same thing when He was raised - *on the third day*.

His resurrection *proved* who He really was and why we should listen to Him and obey Him.

And, at the wedding in Cana, Jesus offers a little preview of this truth *on the third day*.

Let's pray: Father God, ..., in Jesus' name, amen.

[Ask children to leave.]

I'd like us to continue exploring Isaiah's message for us.

And, like last week, you might find some of it makes you uncomfortable - that you

are *resistant* to the Biblical truths that he is attempting to bring out into the light of reason and good sense.

So, last time, I tried to show how the doctrine - the idea - of a *glorious* God - a God of love and justice - *entails*, logically, that there be a "mechanism" - an "air lock"^[n.1] - an outlet - a "Hell," to use the traditional word.

It can't be one without the other.

They go hand-in-hand.

It's like Rebekah said to me later over lunch as we reviewed the Sunday service - as we always do - that: "There's a reason I don't invite a bully" - an *intractable* bully - "to my birthday party [when I'm a kid]."

(I think that's metaphor I've used before.)

Because he'll ruin it - for me and for my other guests.

He'll be an obstacle to what it is meant to be, *which is a celebration!*

He'll sully it and distort it.

And today, Isaiah speaks of the true - *and eternal (!)* - celebration that awaited the Israelite exiles who were now languishing in slums - in makeshift bivouacs - around the city of Babylon.

"*I will not keep silent..[!]*" he cries.

There's just so much to look forward to - in Heaven, when it comes - with the Messiah (Jesus') return.

It will be like a wedding - but not the just a wedding of two young lovers, which is very special in its own, unique way - but a "do-over" a renewal of vows - a *second* wedding for a couple that had been estranged; *divorced* even.

This wasn't a coming together for the first time, but a *re-union*.

A reunion when there had been *very* little hope of such a thing:

notice how he speaks of their separateness as being '[d]esolate.'^[Is. 62:4]

Is there a more depressing word?

Dehydrated isn't lovely.

Moldy is bad.

Toxic isn't great.

But "desolate"?

That's Chernobyl.

That's post-apocalyptic radioactive wasteland.

And this is because 'marriage' is the pinnacle of the metaphors that is used in the Old Testament to describe *right* relationship - with each other *and with God*.

Now, obviously the prophet isn't imagining the marriages of many modern Americans - and here we stray into another prickly subject that effects many of us, directly and indirectly:

For too many the reality of marriage is far less rewarding and gratifying than God intended it to be.

As an institution it is frequently derided - mocked - scoffed at - by comedians, on

TV - and certainly in saloons:

"The ball and chain."

"The old woman."

"Oh, *him*," we might complain:

the grump on the couch who forgot to take the trash out;
who leaves socks on the floor or the toilet-seat up.

But consider it abstractly: a man and woman giving themselves - every ounce and atom - all their treasure and ambitions - to another person, in sickness and in health, for better and for worse.

This is the ideal Church in miniature.

A microcosm of the Divine family; the New Covenant.

What all our relationships are meant to be about: putting the person next to me first, whoever they might be.

Knowing that someone "has your back" - is devoted to you - gives a confidence; a peace-of-mind; a fearlessness that is unparalleled by other, 'more ambiguous' [n.2] "arrangements."

There's numerous studies that have established this.

The failure of marriage, on the other hand, a reality reflected - acknowledged - in the Holy Scriptures, is contrary to God's design and desire. - *because it is an assault* on something that, if we really commit ourselves to it - in theory and practice - produces immense good personally and for wider communities.

Which is why the punishment He inflicts on the Jewish people - by allowing their subjugation and oppression by the Babylonians is only temporary.

He cannot abide being apart from them!

He cannot tolerate their apartness.

He's lovesick for them.

And even though they deserve their treatment, God wants, *even more*, to forgive them and to have intimacy once more.

And the same applies to you and to me.

Too many people choose to be "divorced" from God; to be "desolate."

Too many people are *estranged* from Him, and suffer because of it.

They've embraced a lie that it is better to be a "Lone Ranger" - a singleton - intellectually, spiritually, communally - than to "tie" oneself to something *far* greater - like a tradition, like a *creed*, like a book [hold up Bible], *like the creator!* And though we might break off relations from Him, *He* will never forsake us [Neh. 9:31; Heb. 13:5] - but waits with a 'crown of beauty in [His] hand' - that's what the prophet said.

Let's take a moment to reflect.

Footnotes:

1. See: http://www.saintmatthewschurch.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Sermon-20190113-1st-Sunday-after-Epiphany-Baptism-of-Our-Lord-Year-C-Isaiah-43v1-7-Psalm-29-Acts-8v14-17-and-Luke-3v15-1721-22_BTR.pdf, 4.
2. Stanley, Scott M. (27th of April, 2018), 'Marriage Changes You Before You [Even] Marry', *Psychology Today*, available at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sliding-vs-deciding/201804/marriage-changes-you-you-marry> (accessed January, 18, 2019).