

Epiphany 2, Year C, January 16, 2022

Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-11

Epiphany, Winnipeg

In April of 2020 Val and I looked out our living room window on a fresh spring evening. We live just off of Fermor, so we can see it from our house and we looked and looked and it dawned on us both that there were no cars on the road. Remember that time and those days when everything just stopped? We threw on our jackets and stepped out the door then, and we walked over to Fermor, crawled over the guardrail, and stood in the middle of the TransCanada in the south end of Winnipeg and there was not a car in sight for three minutes. It was empty. Desolate. In some weird way the whole city felt like that.

It's not like that now but there's still a certain emptiness. I was talking with a friend the other day who said that at the place where he works somewhere between a quarter and a third of the people are off work because they're sick. They have COVID or they're close-contact quarantining, or it's some other illness but it all adds up, and how do you keep a business going when everything's going that way? We hear the same sorts of things with health care workers and teachers and restaurant workers and truck drivers.... There's a kind of emptiness out there.

We heard this little bit from the prophet Isaiah a few minutes ago: "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn....You, Jerusalem, shall be a crown of beauty in God's hand...you won't be called Forsaken any longer, and the land will not be

called Desolate, but you shall be called “My Delight Is in Her,” and the land will be called Married. For your God delights in you.”

Here’s what’s going on: It’s about twenty six hundred years ago and the land that the people now call the Holy Land is empty. It seems forsaken, it’s desolate. It’s been that way for decades, as long as seventy years. You see, there’s this Empire from the East called Babylon, and Babylon’s army has moved in and taken over. They’ve flattened the capital city, they’ve taken the treasures of the temple and knocked it down stone for stone. The king and the priests and all the people who once seemed strong and powerful, and so much more of the population have been taken away and forced to live in Babylon. Some have fled west towards Egypt as refugees. There are only a few people left in the land. The crops aren’t being planted and the land is going back to wild. Grass grows through the cracks in what used to be the floor of the temple, the cities are almost empty. No traffic on the roads. Not enough people left to do the work. It all seems empty and over this time the people have sometimes talked about the land being desolate or the nation being forsaken or abandoned by a lover, by their God.

People blame Babylon. They blame their leaders. Sometimes they blame themselves, and there are prophets, like Isaiah, who insist that they are in their mess because they have stopped loving their God and have chased after another. They have stopped loving one another, and have loved money and power instead.

However they got there, for decades they have been away from their home, from this place that now seems forgotten and abandoned.

Then the prophet Isaiah speaks a word from God and says “You will not be desolate forever and you will not be called forsaken forever. And you will get a

new name and you will be called My Delight Is in Her and your land will be called Married. Or to put it more simply, you won't be called Abandoned; you'll be called My Loved One." And God says, "I won't rest until this is done."

The story of God and God's people, right from the start, is not a story of a God who snaps the divine fingers and says "Everything's going to be OK right away; I'm looking after it." Instead, it's a story of the God who is in it for the long haul with the people. That's the important part of this story of God's people: That God is committed to being there for the long haul, at home or in exile, when they're faithful or unfaithful, when everything is right or everything is wrong. God is committed to sticking with the people. To be with us when we feel like everything is just desolate, when Fermor is empty; to be with us when we feel forsaken, when there's no one left to do the work; to be with the world that feels like it's empty and the land is barren and the rivers have dried up and we've got nothing left. That's the God we worship: Not the fix-it-right-now God, but the God who is in it with us for the long haul.

There's another story we heard today, this story of Jesus at a wedding reception with his disciples and his mom, and the party's not ready to end yet but suddenly someone realizes that they've run out of wine...which kind of kills the party, doesn't it? It sort of ends the celebration and in a way the party becomes a wasteland and it's kind of forsaken and abandoned in its own way....not because you have to have wine but just because the party is winding down before its time, and everyone is just going to have to go back home. But Jesus says, "Fill those jars over there with water," and the head waiter tastes the water, but it's become

wine, better wine than before....and the celebration continues, and what was empty or finished is full and keeps on.

It might seem like it's of a story of Jesus snapping his fingers and making everything OK, but even the story of Jesus – who sometimes, but not really very often, heals the sick or makes the deaf hear or the blind see - is not a story like that. The story of Jesus is the story of that God who is in it for the long haul; who takes flesh and lives among us, whose spirit continues to be with us even and especially when we think we're forsaken or we've been abandoned or the land is desolate. The story of Jesus is the story of that God who will not stop until there's new wine all around, and all the dead are raised, and all the cosmos is made new. The story of Jesus is the story of one who is committed to being in our lives in whatever our lives bring: in our celebrations and in our grieving, in our fullness and in our emptiness, our riches or our poverty, our succeeding and our failing, in our being right and our getting it so so wrong, in our being desolate, in our being beloved. It's a story where we see that Jesus is committed to sticking with us, sticking with the actual world and all of its struggles, even if it costs him his life.

It's a story that's taking shape in our lives today, just like it has in the lives of the ones before us for generations and centuries and year upon year. We have been carried along and sustained by this promise of the God who gave us life, of the God who lived among us, of the God whose Spirit breathes and sustains us even now. Our God is with us during the 4th wave or whatever wave it is, in the before time and in all the time to come. Because our God is in it for the long haul. And God will not stop calling the people and the land and the whole creation "My beloved," and "My delight."

AMEN.