

First Sunday of Christmas

NEW NAME, NEW IDENTITY, NEW LIFE

Isaiah 61:10–62:3

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

10 I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. 63:1 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, and her salvation like a burning torch. 2 The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. 3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

DIAGNOSIS: Waiting

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Unsatisfied*

December 25 has come and gone. The gifts have been opened. Out of town guests have returned home. Despite the pastor's insistence that there are twelve days of Christmas, Christmas is "over." And yet, we're still waiting. Even if we remembered that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, we don't feel satisfied.

We have had a lot of celebration—family feasts, opening presents, and the like—but we feel no closer to salvation. We can't find a reason to rejoice (61:10). We're been putting on the new sweaters and neckties we received as gifts, but we still don't feel properly clothed or covered (61:10). We worry about what will happen if others catch on to the fact that we feel empty and exposed. We just can't rest (62:1).

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Unfixable*

If only we could be like “a bridegroom [who] decks himself with a garland” or “a bride [who] adorns herself with her jewels” (61:10). But we don't have the garland of forgiveness or the jewels of salvation to put on ourselves. They aren't things we can find wrapped under the tree or stacked on tables at the post-Christmas sales. We can't manufacture redemption on our own, no matter how devoutly we observe Christmas. Instead of shining out with Christmas joy like a burning torch (62:1), our fear of being exposed curves us in on ourselves. Something is wrong with our hearts. They haven't found the right thing, the right source of salvation, to cling to. We can't fix our hearts.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Under the Law*

We might think that we're hiding our embarrassment about our emptiness and exposure pretty well. But the truth is that we can't hide anything from God. As much as we try to “bring forth” our own righteousness and cause our salvation to “spring up” (61:11) from our empty hearts, we can't do it. We are doomed as “those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:5). The law always exposes and it always accuses. It does not release us from our sins. It does not clothe us with salvation or cover us with righteousness (61:10). Under the law, our hearts will ultimately find something other than emptiness, but it won't be life—it will be God's wrath. It will be death.

PROGNOSIS: Receiving Life

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : A New Name and Identity

But “when the fullness of time had come” (Gal. 4:4), God acted to save us from the law’s accusations and from death itself. He sent his Son Jesus to become flesh like us so he could redeem us. In Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection, the curse of the law has been overturned. In the cross of Christ and his empty tomb, God has given us life.

The prophet Isaiah lists all the great things that God has done to redeem his people. Isaiah declares that God has “clothed me with the garments of salvation” and “covered me with the robes of righteousness” (61:10). Jesus, God made flesh, has taken our sin upon himself. Look to your baptism and you will see God removing your sin and covering you with Jesus’ righteousness. Isaiah promises, “you shall be called by a new name, that the mouth of the Lord will give” (63:2). In our baptism, the prophet’s words are fulfilled in us. We are given this new name: child of God. Our new name reflects our new identity and status. Thanks to what God has done in Jesus, we are now forgiven, renewed, and free.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Joyful Hearts

The apostle Paul echoes Isaiah’s good news about our new identity, our new status, our new family. Paul writes that we have “receive[d] adoption as children” (Gal. 4:5). The joy of being redeemed and saved by God through Jesus Christ fills our hearts. As the good news sinks in that our searching and waiting is over, our joy grows and bursts forth. It cannot be contained. Isaiah describes it this way, “as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up” (62:11). God’s Spirit (Gal. 4:6) blows through our hearts and inspires us to praise our Heavenly

Father. Along with Isaiah, we “greatly rejoice in the Lord,” and “exult in my God” (61:10).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Shining Beauty*

Like the prophet Isaiah giving thanks for God’s great gifts, our thankfulness spills out from our hearts to our lips so that our neighbors will know where to turn to find life and joy as well. To paraphrase Isaiah, we could say, “For [our neighbor’s] sake I will not keep silent, and for [our neighbor’s] sake I will not rest” (62:1). We have great news to share—news that the waiting and restless hearts of others are longing to hear. Redeemed by Christ, each one of God’s children is “a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord.” Each one is “a royal diadem in the hand of your God” (62:3). The beauty of God’s love fills our hearts and shines out in our words and deeds. When others look at us and see God’s mercy and grace shining out “like the dawn,” and God’s gift of “salvation like a burning torch” (62:1), they won’t be able to help but draw near. Their ears will strain to hear the new names that the mouth of the Lord will give them, such as “Forgiven and Beloved Children of God” and “Heirs of Salvation” (Gal. 4:7).