

Second Sunday of Christmas

GOD TURNS MOURNING TO JOY

Jeremiah 31:7-14

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Analysis by Peter Keyel

7 For thus says the LORD: Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save, O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel." 8 See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together; a great company, they shall return here. 9 With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. 10 Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock." 11 For the LORD has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. 12 They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. 13 Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. 14 I will give the priests their fill of fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

DIAGNOSIS: Crying for Justice

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

Judah had plenty of reasons to weep. Occupation, conquest, exile, death.... Life is hard. Weeping is hard for us to think about in the Christmas season. And yet, there are still reasons to weep. For all the magic of Christmas, the world is still the same. Wars, rumors of wars, local problems...there are lots of good reasons to weep. The usual solution is to stand up and fight injustices, and fight to avoid loss. We propose building a better world, and solving the injustices so that we never need to weep again. We trust leaders who promise change from the status quo.

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

Fighting was the solution Judah chose to solve its problems. That ended with exile. It didn't fix the weeping or the sadness. Fighting injustice doesn't seem to solve the injustices, because as soon as you fix one problem, the solution either creates new ones, or people find a new way to perpetrate injustice. It's a long hard road to trying to make any change meaningful.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Scattered*

Part of the problem is that it goes deeper than mourning or a sense of injustice or trying to fight injustice. God is the one who scattered Judah and God is the one who not only permits injustice, but uses sinners to bring other sinners down. We cannot solve the problem of injustice on our own, or even with our community, our church or any power-structure that we try to build. It's hopeless and we too will end up scattered.

PROGNOSIS: Dying for Mercy

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Gathered*

The Good News is that scattering is not the final Word for us. God has gathered Israel and ransomed Jacob from hands too strong for him (vv. 10-11). That Christ-child whose birth we just celebrated has redeemed the world. Jesus did not do this through fighting for justice, but dying on a cross for showing mercy to sinners. God's resurrection of Jesus seals God's promise that mercy is God's final Word for sinners.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Joy

This redemption directly turns mourning into joy. Jeremiah describes poetically what this transformative event does to sinners touched by God. No longer is there mourning, or even fighting. Injustice is overwhelmed by God's mercy.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Consolation

The world still doesn't seem any different. But in other ways, it is completely changed now that we have been ransomed from the hands too strong for us. God's consolation is ours. We no longer need to fight injustice, because God has that covered. Instead, we are freed to be consoled by God and bring that consolation to others. Through showing mercy to other sinners, even those perpetrating the injustice, we spread God's promise of salvation and turn mourning into joy. Even when we do work to change the status quo, we do so based in the joy that we have in Christ and in sharing that joy with others.