

1st Pres San Bernardino

Called By A New Name

Is. 62:1-5, Jn 2:1-11

1/14/07 MLKing Wknd

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If the promises of God had not been so big... the Israelites would not have been so discouraged when they finally got home. The expectation had been so high. They had been captives in Babylon for 3 generations, and there they had heard God say, "Comfort, Comfort my people...your warfare is accomplished" and "Every valley shall be exalted" and "You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace." Once they were finally released in 580 or so, only a few of them returned to Judea, bearing their sacred treasures of the Torah and the holy vessels for worship. But it was a mess- **not what they had hoped for** at all. the Temple was in ruins, justice was perverted, and there was chaos because of poor leadership. Disillusionment set in, and it set in Big Time. What they hoped for and believed in did not come to pass. Lots of them left.

If the Dream had not been so big, perhaps those who marched and who prayed and who celebrated when the law was signed would not have become so discouraged that it has been so long in coming. What they hoped for and believed in has not come to pass-at least not in the way they had hoped. And many are disillusioned, and tired.

If the prospects **of this Great American City** had not been so great, perhaps we would not be so discouraged that in recent decades San Bernardino has not lived up to its potential. It was, according to members of this congregation, a great place to grow up-full of music and laughter and family and community. But this neighborhood and many like it fell victim to poor **planning** that allowed people to tear down Craftsman homes and build cheap apartments, and to unethical **landlords** who take money out of our community, live elsewhere, and let their property devolve into appalling conditions. This is not what we had hoped for. Disillusionment set in, and set in Big Time. Lots of them have left.

"You shall be called by a new name", the passage says, "that the mouth of the Lord shall give."

A new name is a new identity- happens all the time in scripture. We talked about it last week: we are **called by name** in baptism, we are God's own, we are beloved. But if our beloved-ness does not compel us to action on behalf of our brothers and sisters in need, then we need to re-examine our beloved-ness, because we have misunderstood it.

Real Discipleship costs something. Real Dreaming makes demands on you.

We need to balance **the comfort of belonging to God** with **the demands of discipleship.**

I have a **dear friend** who is in my preaching study group. We've known each other well for some years, and long ago we began teasing each other about our preaching tendencies. Whenever we look at a text together and say, 'how would I preach this text?,' **I see the comfort and he sees the challenge.**

I see the call to recognize our belovedness, he sees the challenge to be living witnesses. I see God's invitation to intimacy, he sees God's call to initiative.

He teases me that my reading of the Bible can verge on the sentimental, I tease him that his reading sounds like 'Boot Camp'.

But he is right about something. He knows something that Jesus knew and that Dr. King knew and that we also must know: Real **Discipleship is not just about comfort, it is about challenge**. Real Discipleship is not finding a sacred place to belong and never leaving it. It is letting the sacred dwell in you so deeply that it can never be taken from you, and letting that propel you into challenges you never imagined you could take on.

Last week, I said that **before we are anything else we are beloved children of God**. I also said that we are being **redeemed toward fearlessness**, because that sense of Belovedness in God is the one thing I know that has **power over fear**.

A true call should drive us to our knees to pray because the obstacles are so great. And true prayer should propel us up again, bcz God is greater than the obstacles.

"You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord shall give."

By what name shall we be known?

When I spoke with someone during the search process about this church, I was told "there are a lot of heavy hitters in that church, movers and shakers in this community"

The Heavy Hitter's Church? The Mayor's Church??

Not good enough.

There are some who say that we should give up on the center of this city. They say that the center of this city is rotten, and ought to be ignored. It is too far gone, they say, to redeem or to save. We should invest all our civic money and attention where the neighbors are more affluent and the problems are less visible.

Yesterday, as I arrived at church around 8:30 in the morning, I met **Cheryl**. My 6th grader Bethany recognized her as a 'regular' on food distribution days. She presents as someone with intellectual limitations, but there was no limit to her enthusiasm. She was walking briskly through the parking lot with a friend, pushing a small folding grocery cart.- and she was regaling her friend so loudly that I could hear her through the car window as I drove past. She was saying, "...and you have to get here real early in the morning, because the line gets long.." When she saw I was parking she pushed her cart over purposefully, "Good morning!!" she said, "You TELL my friend here what GOOD food you give out and how many people you help!" she charged me.

So I told her friend the details about the food distribution, and that she would need I.D., but that she would be welcome. "But I live in *downtown* San Bernardino," she said incredulously, "can I *still* come?" Yes, I assured her, we would be glad to help.

"You SEE??" said Cheryl gleefully, "you SEE!?" she turned to me with a gap toothed grin and said "I'm here every time. I'll see you next week!" She waved enthusiastically, and as she walked away I heard her saying, "**I TOLD you what kind of a church this is!**"

How about the ***Church that Cheryl Counts On?***

Last week, in her presentation to us about Time for Change, **Kim Carter** talked about the work she does helping women who have been incarcerated transform their lives. It was stunning to hear these women speak of their faith in God and their progress toward an independent future as contributing members of our community. Some think such women are too far gone to redeem or save. But she is proving otherwise. And we are partners with her-she said this congregation is one she can count on, because we contribute to her work and we do it regularly. It made me wonder what else we might do with her. What about *the Church that Makes for Change?* Or *The Church that Loves Its Neighbors?*

We all get disillusioned, we all think about leaving or giving up sometimes. We become discouraged because we regularly something: **In every time and place, in every culture, in every human organization- God is at work.** That includes the United States in the Sixties, and it includes Jerusalem after the exile, and it includes our city, right here and right now.

In every time and place, and in every human organization there are people of good will, working for good. Some are Christians and are living out their discipleship. Others are people who work for peace and justice for other reasons, and who are part of God's purposes nonetheless.

They are like **leaven**, Jesus said, like **salt**- they can change the whole structure, the whole chemistry. Make no mistake, friends: God is still dreaming the Dream, and there are dreamers still in this zip code, and transformation is taking place.

We are not called to fix the whole thing. We are not called repair generations of damage, or to single handedly repair a temple in ruins, we are not called to be Martin Luther King. We are called to love God and do what we can.

We are called to ask God "what is the one action you are calling me to take today?"

It will likely be ordinary: to speak truth to a colleague

To write or speak to a councilperson.

To have hands-on involvement in our food ministry or another work.

Real Discipleship costs something. Real Dreaming has demands on you.

We need to balance **the comfort of belonging to God** with **the demands of discipleship.**

If the promises of God had not been so grand, if the Dream had not been so compelling, if our hopes for the Great American City had not been so deep, we would no be discouraged or disillusioned. But the truth is sometimes we are.

We do not always get what we hope for. Sometimes the bad guys seem to prevail. And sometimes good people die. But the Dream does not die.

And God is not mocked.

Hear this passage from Isaiah again, with two slight editorial changes:

Isaiah 62:1 - 5 (NRSV) ¹ For *The Inland Empire's* sake I will not keep silent, and for *San Bernardino'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. ⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord shall give. That is God's promise and our hope.

By what name shall we be called?
How about *the Church that Never Gave Up,*
The Church That Kept Dreaming,
The Church That Never Stopped Believing,
The Church that Helped Restore this City?

You may say to me, "But we don't have anything extraordinary to give. The problems have become enormous, and we are ordinary people. We are not Dr. King, We are without resources and discouraged.

Well, so was the host of the wedding at Cana.

The wine was all gone.

The resources were drained.

The jars were empty.

And though she couldn't figure out what good it might do, Mary had the good sense to do the one simple action she felt called by God to do: to say to Jesus, 'the wine is all gone.'

Yes- what we have to offer is ordinary, the ordinary things that people do.

But the God we serve is extraordinary.

If we are willing to do what we can, Jesus will take care of the transformation part.

What we put in is just water.

And here is what will be said of this church:

"They saved the best wine until last."