

## **ISAIAH 62:1-5** **DISTANT DeLIGHT**

On the morning I began to write this sermon, there was a beautiful sunrise. I watched it as I read my morning devotions. Later I turned to my social media, and Facebook was scattered with pictures of the sunrise. So other people agreed with me. They liked the sunrise. They liked the light.

That's what this reading is about, a beautiful light. It's off in the distance. And just like those on social media had to share what they saw with others, so also Isaiah has our LORD God saying that He will not keep silent about this light. He calls it a brightness like a burning torch, and that's what the sunrise looked like. It was various shades of red across the sky on fire.

So, imagine Isaiah to be like someone who is posting for a friend who doesn't have a social media account. Isaiah is posting, but it's the LORD God who's speaking here, and He doesn't want to be quiet about this brightness that He sees off in the distance. He sees it because He's outside of time. The Israelites didn't see it, nor do we see it today. We'd like to see it when we hear about it, and we often want to tell people about what's coming, but then the question arises as to how do you tell someone about something good that you can't even see yourself, but only heard about.

For starters, it might help to take a look at what God is looking at. For the Israelites this is a bit strange, or quite a lot more than a bit. God is looking into the future and He sees that Israel is going to go into exile, and then He sees that they will be rescued from exile. And God is saying that this is great thing!

That would be like someone telling me that I'm going to ditch my car in a snowstorm next week, but then some kind passerby is going to pull me out of the ditch, and then exclaiming, "Isn't that great!" Meanwhile I think, "How can that be great? You just told me that I'm going to ditch my car. I don't want that to happen!"

For the Israelites they could've had the same reaction. 'What do you mean that our people are going to go into exile? How can you declare that to be something to celebrate like a bright burning torch? You know, if we don't go into exile we won't need to be saved from exile. Wouldn't that be better?'

And yet this isn't really about exiles and cars in the ditch. This is about something worse. It's about a corrupt sinful nature that brings about the exiles and all the other problems that we have in life, and it's about being rescued from that bigger problem. It's about a bigger salvation on the horizon. Off in the distance God could see it, even though the Israelites couldn't see it, and we often forget about it, even though we've heard about it many times.

By now I remember that there was a beautiful sunrise, but I don't remember what it really looked like. I didn't take a picture or video of it. I guess I could go back and look at the posts on social media to see what it really looked like, or I could just live with the image that I've made up in my mind.

For what God wants to show us we could do the same. There's a social media post that will tell you all about His salvation in great detail. We call that the Bible. You can read it, or you can be satisfied with the image that you've created in your own minds.

What God is seeing off in the distance in our reading, and what He's slowly revealing for us is the full and final manifestation of Jesus' glory in the hour of His death, when He's high and lifted up on the cross for the forgiveness of the sins of the world – to bring life to this world. He sees the glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth, and He sees your glory, the Bride of Jerusalem, those who confess that Jesus is LORD.

In our reading God is saying that He's going to keep talking about this glory until this brightness dawns on you. Think of any message of good news in your lives from being in that ditch and being told that the tow truck driver is on his way, to being in the hospital and the doctor arrives to tell you that everything is going to be okay. You turn to the person traveling with you and shout out that the tow truck is coming. You call your family and tell them mom is going to be okay. When you receive good news, you want to tell someone, and as God says that He won't be quiet about His Good News to you, when you hear it then in turn you'll feel that compulsion to not be quiet about it yourselves.

This is a message for your good. This is a message of hope. This message tells you that the LORD is going to turn things around for you. This is a message that is meant to sustain you for the long haul. We have to admit that. This hope is off in the distance for many of us, and it's not about to immediately change the circumstances of your life.

Yet, because most of us see this as being off in the distance, we think we're not going to die today, or meet Jesus today, we put it off. We'll think about Jesus another day. Yet for God He wants to tell you today. He says that He will not be quiet until His righteousness goes forth as brightness in your life and salvation as a burning torch. Thus we make our posts for God and tell others, or we struggle to find the courage to tell others about God, because we know that the message that we carry may not bring about an immediate change for others, for their health issues, for those straying from their faith, for those with social problems from hunger to drunken parents failing to raise their children with love and care. It's Good News, but it isn't always well received from us.

So much of what I preach I won't see any fruit from it, and yet it's still Good News meant to sustain you until you have your problems resolved in this lifetime like Israelites rescued from exile, or you find your fulfillment in heaven with Jesus. Not all preaching is about pointing out sins. This message from God is one that He can't keep silent about because it's Good News that's meant to be shared. When you have the promise of salvation you want to share that promise with your children and grandchildren. We've gotten into the habit of liking and sharing what others have shared on social media like a picture of a beautiful sunrise, so we can also naturally do that with God's Word.

This is what is called the mutual consolation of the saints. Together we bear one another's burdens and lift one another up by speaking the Word of God to one another as the Bible tells us to do: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" – Colossians 3:16.

That passage from Colossians is directed towards you the laity, and not the clergy. You're called to speak up for one another and share the Word of God with one another. You don't get to pass the buck and say that you're not the pastor or Sunday school teacher. For each of you your different callings in life provide you with different opportunities to pass on this burning torch of salvation. Sure, some people may not want to listen to you, and they may plug their ears with earbuds or their fingers, or just walk away from you, like many of the Israelites likely walked away from Isaiah's message from God about an upcoming exile that they would be rescued from.

However, for the sake of your children or neighbours you keep talking so that this righteousness may dawn in their lives. This promise from God compels you to share it with others.

That Jesus whom God saw off in a distance dying on a cross for the forgiveness of the sins of the world actually rose from the dead. In our baptismal waters we are actually joined to Jesus' death and resurrection as we heard last week, "all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). In Baptism Jesus clothes us with a dazzling white robe of His righteousness that covers all our sins (Revelation 7:14). Now, today, you're in Christ without spot, blemish, wrinkle or stain (Ephesians 5:27). To God you're like a beautiful bride prepared and adorned for her wedding day (Revelation 21:2). This is God's promise to you. He has spoken it in many of His posts in the Bible, and He won't stop having His ministers repost for Him until you are fully and completely His radiant eternal bride. Amen.