

Sermon Notes

The sermon provides a vital opportunity to lift up God's intention for our life together to be marked by justice and peace and to connect it with the challenges and opportunities today.

The Torah portion, Bo, designated for January 19th includes the final plagues and the first Passover, offering the opportunity to connect with themes of oppression and freedom, children who are lost and children who are spared, and remembrance.

The following sermon notes are based on the lectionary texts designated for Sunday, January 20th, 2013--the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C. If your place of worship follows one of these lectionaries, draw on the sermon notes as useful and appropriate.

Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, Episcopal Lectionary

- Isa. 62:1-5
- Ps. 36:5-10 (Revised); Ps. 95 (Roman Catholic), Ps. 96 (Episcopal)
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 (Roman Catholic Lectionary vv. 4-11)
- John 2:1-11

Isaiah 62:1-5

*62 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.*

*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.*

For us at this time, we hear these promises especially as they follow on the verses of Isaiah 61:1-4 which promise the binding up of the broken-hearted, comfort for those of mourn. Isaiah heralds “They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.”

In these difficult days, it has been easy to feel that our nation has been called Desolate. When 20 children were gunned down along with teachers and administrators, call us Desolate. When more than 7 children die each and every day from guns in our nation, call us Desolate. When unmet health and mental health needs stretch children and families to the breaking point, call us Desolate. When Christmas gifts—celebrating the birth of the Prince of Peace—included gaily wrapped violent video games and movies, call us Desolate.

But God’s promise is that we will no longer be called Desolate, but My Delight Is In Her. What changes do we need to make in our life together to live into the promise of God’s Delight? How might we address a cultural glorification of violence, tragic child gun deaths, unmet health and mental health needs to become a community in which all experience God’s delight? How might we bind up the broken-hearted, comfort those who mourn, repair ruined cities and the devastations of many generations? What kind of action will that call from us as individuals, congregations, communities, and a nation?

I Corinthians 12:1-11

12 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.² You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak.³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

“To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” God has given each of us gifts, not for our personal pleasure or aggrandizement, but for the common good. Our nation is beset by violence, diminished by a culture that glorifies violence, wracked by unmet health and mental health needs, and more. What can we do to contribute to the common good, so that all children know peace, love, safety, and well-being? What wisdom and knowledge can we bring to bear? How might we use gifts of

faith or of healing to bring wholeness to children who suffer? What kind of prophetic leadership and thoughtful discernment might one offer? What other gifts can each of us bring? No one can do everything, but everyone can do something to contribute to the common good so that all children may thrive. The World Council of Churches' Week of Prayer for Christian Unity runs from January 18-25th. Seeking the common good of children is surely one of the values and priorities that unites us as Christians and connects us too with other great faith traditions.

John 2:1-11

Gail R. O'Day, in *The New Interpreters Bible*, writes of this passage about the miracle at Cana:

“John 2:1-11 poses hard questions for the interpreter, because the miracle challenges conventional assumptions about order and control, about what is possible, about where God is found and how God is known...The grace the miracle offers and the glimpse of Jesus' glory it provides (2:11) run outside conventional expectations and place the reader at odds with how he or she thought the world was ordered. The interpretive task is not to put this miracle in a framework in which it 'makes sense'...but to free the faith community to receive the extraordinary gifts this miracle offers....The story invites the reader to see what the disciples see, that in the abundance and graciousness of Jesus' gift, one catches a glimpse of the identity and character of God.” (p. 540)

When we contemplate the transformation so that every child knows peace, justice, and well-being, it can seem impossible—so impossible that we are tempted to give up or deny the need or not even try to make a difference. Our rational, sensible, adult minds tell us we will never keep guns out of the hands of those who kill our children, or we will never end the glamorization of violence in our culture, or we will never be able to strengthen and heal the most fragile children or emotionally fraught families. We get mired down in our limited sense of what could ever be possible.

And yet, our passage today invites us to see in such abundance and graciousness, as O'Day notes, the character of God. If we trust in God's abundance and graciousness, can we live more fully, joyfully, and hopefully as we seek to transform our life together as God intends?