**Sermon Epiphany 2C**

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**Text:** *“and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” (Isaiah 62:1-5)*

My fellow redeemed in Christ: if you come today burdened by a particular sin or vexation, there is a world of comfort from the mouth of the Lord. Gathered in the Church, there be no recourse to our own merits, worthiness, or sense of righteousness; salvation is a free gift to be received by faith. We begin with our Old Testament lesson, in which the Lord says to His people through the prophet Isaiah: “For Zion’s sake I will not be quiet, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch.” (Is 62:1) Previous to this verse, Isaiah had sang out a beautiful ode: “For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to sprout up before all nations.” (61:11) Like harvest following the rain, righteousness is produced by the Word of God. (55:10-11)

Furthermore, the kind of righteousness Isaiah has in view is not the deeds His people had performed. In chapter sixty-four, the prophet, now speaking on behalf of his people, confesses: “Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.” (64:5-6) These “filthy rags” come in contrast with the “crown of beauty” and “royal diadem” of our text (62:3). The declaration that God would present His sinful and rebellious people as holy and righteous is nothing short of a miracle. It is indeed a task for which God prepares: “The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.” (62:2) Salvation is God’s work beginning to end.

The manner in which God planned to save His people – a people, bear in mind, not tied together by common ethnic heritage nor legal code like ancient Israel, but “a great multitude… from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9) – comes to full realization in the holy and righteous career of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. In what is called the “blessed exchange,” Christ bore the penalty for our transgressions and imputed His spotless record to us. Through free forgiveness of sins, each member – you and me – of this beloved community called the “Church” enjoys the same assurance. As Bl. Dr. Luther writes in *On the Freedom of a Christian*, faith

unites the soul with Christ as a bride united with her bridegroom … And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage – indeed the most perfect of all marriages, since human marriages are but poor examples of this one true marriage – it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins death, and damnation will be Christ’s, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul’s; for Christ is a bridegroom … Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by Him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, “If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all His is mine and mine is His,” as the bride in the Song of Solomon says, “My beloved is mine and I am his.”