

Sermon 2010 Epiphany 2
Text: Isaiah 62:1-5
Theme: "Forsaken No More"

I remember being 13 and standing in front of the mirror and trying to look good. I would comb my hair first one way and then another. I would try the feathered Shawn Cassidy bangs and then the across the eye Glen Campbell part, but at 13, no matter what I did, nothing looked right. I look back at pictures now and I looked like a pretty typical 13 year old guy, but at the time, I felt horribly ugly, gawky, fat and forsaken.

We all have our times in life of feeling forsaken; feeling like nothing is right, no one loves us and wishing that the world would just open up and swallow us whole. In our first year here, when we moved into the house we rented over on Monterey, we were unpacking the kitchen and we found some cheap bottles of wine shoved into the cabinet over the refrigerator. They were covered in dust and looked like they had been there for quite a few years. I don't know how many tenants ago had forgotten that wine when they moved – or maybe left it on purpose.

Dänya, wanted to throw it away, but being Lutheran, I would sooner cut off my right arm than throw something away. She can't help herself. She wasn't always Lutheran you know. Anyway, I wiped those bottles off and used them for cooking, except for one that had a kind of strange label. Dänya decided to throw that one in basket for her boss for Christmas. He never stopped talking about it. With what we know about wine you could fill a thimble, but apparently that was a really unusual bottle of wine. So what was actually a diamond, had been forsaken in the cabinet for a long time.

In many ways, we are like a bottle of wine that grows finer and finer with age. None of our best attributes are very apparent at the start but as we grow, through the experiences we have both good and bad, the Lord slowly polishes us. The process is rarely much fun, but it is the way the Lord brings out who he has made us.

When we were baptized, we received a new name, given by the mouth of the Lord. No longer are we Rob or Mary or Rachel or Katie but we are "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." When that new name is placed upon us, a legal contract is fulfilled. Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and we receive the

benefit of that death. However, having received the benefit of that death, we are bottled up and shoved into the far recesses of the wine cellar of life where we age.

Do not think of yourself as “forsaken” when you go through trials and hardships. We are never “forsaken.” In fact God specifically says:

You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate.

Because we have been renamed, trials and hardships are just part of the aging process. We grow to be more than we ever expected. At our Baptisms, Jesus used water to change us into something like a fine wine. Like a fine wine, I am not at my full potential when first bottled. That gawky, chubby 13 year old needed to age and grow and learn until he became the beautiful swan that stands before you today – well okay, so maybe a little more aging is in order.

On the other hand, part of the process was that I learned that hair was not nearly as important as I was making it. In fact, it didn't really matter. And I learned that when one stops trying to control the gifts, they grow and multiply in ways before unimagined. And I think I

am beginning to approach the gift of contentment, being content in whatever God gives you wherever he gives it. I'm not there yet, but I think I can see it on the horizon.

And I expect that given enough time, my Baptismal water will continue washing me. I will continue to be refined and more and more dross will be consumed until one day, God will reach up over the refrigerator and take this old, dusty bottle down; blow off the dust, pop the cork and I will finally know what my potential is. None of us really know that of which we are capable until the race is through. That is why, although we miss our friends and loved ones who die before us, we are not overcome with grief. There is in fact great joy surging beneath the grief. It is an amazing and wondrous moment when Baptismal waters have completed their work and fine wine is decanted. AMEN