

“Gloria”
Isaiah 61:1-11
Rev. Curtis Bablitz
December 17th, 2023

Music is a wonderful gift from God, and it is a great privilege to be able to sing and play together with a big group of people, everybody with their own part to play, all of those little parts working together in harmony to make something beautiful. Music brings people together, it relaxes us, it makes our memory stronger, it is a powerful force for good. And of course, that means that we often use it to cause trouble. Somehow, music is one of those things that people love to fight about, especially in church – the kind of music we sing, the instruments we use, the songs we like and the ones we don’t, it’s so easy to take this beautiful gift we’ve been given and turn it into a source of conflict and turmoil instead of a source of joy.

And this isn’t just true of music – human beings are incredibly gifted at taking just about every good gift God has given us and turning it into something to fight about, something destructive instead of constructive, something that divides instead of unite. That’s what humans do – we take garlands and turn them to ashes, we take beautiful things and find ever more creative ways to ruin them. If we can’t keep things all for ourselves, if we can’t have things exactly the way we

think they should be, we're all too willing to burn it all to the ground rather than compromise. If we can't have it our way, we'd rather have nothing at all, and we'll make sure no one else has anything either.

And yet, while human beings are busy tearing things down, God is always, always, always at work, building them up. When we take all the good gifts God has given us and destroy them, God takes the ashes and rubble that we've made out of our world, and God uses those ashes to create something beautiful again. In the midst of the rubble and ashes of their destroyed world, God promises the people of Zion that beauty and gladness and joy are on the way. God is going to take those ashes and turn them back into a beautiful garland. God will turn mourning into gladness, faint spirits and downcast hearts into a mantle of praise, turn a broken, ruined people into oaks of righteousness, planted and rooted in the love of God.

And God does all this so that the world will see the Glory of the Lord – when the world sees how God's people have been transformed, how all the things that sin and death destroyed have been made right again, when they see the joy that comes from following God, then they will know who God is, they will understand what it means to belong to such a powerful, loving, transformative God. And we

see this most perfectly in Jesus Christ – from earthly things, out of ashes and dust, God formed the child of Bethlehem, the Son of God, the one who would bring good news to the oppressed, bind up the brokenhearted, bring liberty to the captives and set the prisoners free.

That's the God we worship today. God gives us joy so that we can give God glory – God takes our broken hearts and broken homes, and sends transformation and love, so that in our joy, we can praise and celebrate what God has done for us, so the world will see it and want to know more about who God is. This is what we were created for – to glorify and enjoy God forever, to give God glory and receive the joy of the Lord. When we sing with joy to our creator and king, every song we sing is Gloria. Every song, every act of service and love, every gift we share, it's all Gloria. It's all glory to the God who gives us joy, who transforms our brokenness into beauty, who comes to us to set us free.