

We call God Father, Creator, King and Lord. The bible uses many different images to help us understand God, including mother, light and love. A rather startling image of God appears in a passage from Isaiah tonight. God is a cad. God is like a young husband who quickly grows tired of his wife and dumps her. Not exactly a holy card kind of image of God. By the time we catch up with this scene, God is different. God tenderly calls Israel his bride back again, but unquestionably there has been a nasty breakup: "The Lord calls you back," Isaiah says with God's voice, "like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, a wife married in youth and then cast off. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back. In an outburst of wrath, for a moment I hid my face from you; but with enduring love I take pity on you, says the Lord, your redeemer."

Our first reaction might be, "Who wants to have a God like that?" But the passage is meant to bring consolation to Israel after they had been carried off into exile. It's meant to tell the people that their covenant with God is like a strong marriage. It may hit a decisive moment of anger and even separation, but the union will be preserved. We sometimes feel like God has abandoned us out of anger, and then we feel like God took us back. The changes in our fortunes make it appear that God changes his mind, that God gets angry and punishes, but then relents. The best we can say about God in this passage from Isaiah is that if God did cast off Israel his young bride out of anger, at least he admitted it. That's the way our ancestors in their misfortune came to understand their God.

Today we'd search for a better metaphor, ask God for a different role model, please. There must be a better way to make these points: The covenant is everlasting. God never completely forsakes us, even if it feels like something is wrong.

Tonight, those of you to be baptized will begin that covenant with God in a new way. Any Christian can tell you that the spiritual life has its ups and downs, but the promise of tonight is that God will remain with you through them all. In spite of our struggles with the spiritual life, tonight we will state again our belief in the God of the covenant and splash ourselves with the water that gave us that promise.

This easter comes during the year of jubilee, a year in which the church calls us to reconciliation. Many Christians discover they not only need reconciliation with one another, they need reconciliation with God. They feel like God has hurt them, abandoned them, and they want some answers. If Isaiah is right, God understands very well how we often feel about him. God understands that we have questions. God's ultimate answer is Easter.