

BAPTISM OF OUR LORD
ISAIAH 43:1-7, LUKE 3:15-22
SUNDAY, JANUARY 9, 2022
TRADITIONAL

A NEW STUDENT WONDERS WHERE SHE WILL SIT IN THE SCHOOL CAFETERIA, WHICH GROUP SHE SHOULD JOIN, HOW WELL SHE WILL BE RECEIVED.

A MOTHER WALKS DOWN THE HALL INTO HER DAUGHTER'S EMPTY BEDROOM, LEFT BEHIND WHEN HER NOW GROWN CHILD HEADED OFF TO COLLEGE. NOW THE MOTHER WONDERS WHAT LIES AHEAD – FOR HER, FOR HER DAUGHTER AND FEELS ADRIFT.

AN OLDER MAN MOANS IN HIS SICK BED. ONCE ENJOYING HIS RETIREMENT, HE HAS NOW BEEN LAYED LOW BY A CHRONIC ILLNESS AND FEELS WORTHLESS AS HE HAS NOTHING TO SHOW FOR HIS DAYS.

A YOUNG MAN DRIVES BACK TO HIS HOME-TOWN AFTER BEING IN A MINIMUM SECURITY PRISON FOR EMBEZZLEMENT AT WORK. HE WONDERS IF HE WILL EVER HOLD ANOTHER JOB, IF THE TRUE PENALTY HE MUST BEAR IS A LIFETIME SENTENCE FOR HIS WRONGDOINGS.

WHO AM I? WHERE DO I BELONG/ WHAT MAKES ME WORTHY? THESE QUESTIONS, WHICH BEGIN TO GET ASKED IN YOUNG ADOLESCENCE, NEVER REALLY GO AWAY, DO THEY? WE OFTEN LOOK FOR ANSWERS IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES – OUR WORK, OUR PEER GROUPS, OUR ROLE AS PARENT, OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THE STUFF WE ACCUMULATE OVER TIME.

IN ISAIAH 43, THE PROPHET SPEAKS TO A PEOPLE WHO ARE BRUISED AND WEARY. AS A PUNISHMENT FOR THEIR ARROGANCE AND DISOBEDIENCE, GOD HAS ALLOWED THEM TO BE CONQUERED BY THE BABYLONIANS AND THROWN INTO EXILE. ISAIAH 42 AND BEFORE SHOWS THE PROPHET GIVING WORDS OF HARSH JUDGEMENT. BUT HERE HE HAS WORDS OF COMFORT AND HOPE. THESE

WORDS REMIND THE EXILED ISRAELITES WHO THEY ARE AND TO WHOM THEY BELONG, IN SPITE OF THEIR SINS.

VERSE 4 TELLS THEM PLAINLY WHO THEY ARE: “BECAUSE YOU ARE PRECIOUS IN MY SIGHT, AND HONORED, AND I LOVE YOU, I GIVE PEOPLE IN RETURN FOR YOU, NATIONS IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR LIFE.” THIS PEOPLE, WHO HAVE BEEN UPROOTED AND STAND ON THE EDGE OF A HOSTILE EMPIRE NOW HAVE A NEW AND DIFFERENT IDENTITY – THEY ARE A PEOPLE VALUED AND HONORED BY GOD.

VERSE 1 TELLS THEM TO WHOM THEY BELONG: “DO NOT FEAR, I HAVE REDEEMED YOU, I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME, YOU ARE MINE.” SEE, IN SPITE OF THEMSELVES, THE ONE WHO CREATED THEM HAS NOT TURNED AWAY FROM THEM. INSTEAD, GOD STILL CLAIMS ISRAEL AND HOLDS ONTO THEM. ISRAEL BELONGS TO GOD AS A SHEEP TO ITS SHEPHERD. THEREFORE, THEY HAVE NO NEED TO FEAR THEIR FOES, THE RAGING WATERS, THE DANGER OF THE FIRE.

YES, ISAIAH 42 PROCLAIMS ANGRY WORDS OF JUDGEMENT AND DISAPPOINTMENT, BUT IN CHAPTER 43, ISRAEL COMES TO KNOW THAT GOD’S WORDS OF COMFORT AND RESTORATION ARE GREATER THAN ISRAEL’S SINS. GOD WILL NOT LET THE RIVERS OVERWHELM THEM OR THE FLAMES CONSUME THEM.

IN THE WRATH OF ISAIAH 42, AND THESE WORDS OF GRACE AND MERCY IN ISAIAH 43, AS PAUL HANSEN IN HIS COMMENTARY SAYS SO WELL, “FAITH RECOGNIZES THE PRESENCE OF GOD WHO WILLS ONLY TO LOVE AND BE LOVED IN RETURN.”

WHO ARE WE? WHERE DO WE BELONG? WHAT MAKES US WORTHY? ISAIAH SPEAKS TO US, NOT ONLY AS INDIVIDUALS, BUT ALSO TO US AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH. HE REMINDS US THAT WHO WE ARE AT THE CORE, IS NOT OUR ROLE AS INDIVIDUALS, NOT IN OUR SIZE OR WEALTH AS A CONGREGATION, BUT IN GOD’S IDENTIFICATION OF US AS “PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT AND HONORED”.

OUR SENSE OF BELONGING COMES NOT FROM THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PEERS OR THE STATUS OF THE COMMUNITY OR UNIVERSITY FROM WHICH WE HAVE COME, BUT FROM THE ONE WHO CLAIMS US AND WILL NEVER LET US GO. WHAT MAKES US WORTHY IS NOT OUR INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENTS, OR EVEN THE CONGREGATIONAL MISSION, BUT THE GOOD AND GRACIOUS LOVE OF GOD.

GOD CALLS ISRAEL PRECIOUS IN HIS SIGHT, DESPITE THEIR SINS. WHEN YOU AND I FAIL AND FALL (AND WE DO, AND WE WILL), WE CAN TAKE COMFORT IN THE REALIZATION THAT OUR SHORTCOMINGS DO NOT PROMPT GOD TO QUIT LOVING US OR DENY HIS CLAIM ON US. WE CAN TRUST AND STAKE OUR HOPE IN THE GOD WHO IS WITH US AND WILL LOVE US EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE CHAOS OF OUR OWN DOING.

TODAY WE CELEBRATE THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, AND THIS TEXT IS THE PERFECT COMPLIMENT TO OUR GOSPEL FOR TODAY. IN THE WATERS OF BAPTISM, WE ARE MARKED WITH THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. IN OTHER WORDS, WE ARE CLAIMED AS GOD'S CHILDREN. IN THE WATERS OF BAPTISM, GOD SEALS HIS LOVE FOR US, NO MATTER WHAT WE MIGHT HAVE DONE, AND WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN DOWN THE ROAD. THE WORDS OF GOD THE FATHER THROUGH HIS HOLY SPIRIT TO JESUS ARE EVIDENCE OF THAT WHEN HE TELLS JESUS "YOU ARE MY BELOVED, WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED.

THE HEAVENS ARE OPENED AND GOD'S POWERFUL BLESSING SENDS JESUS ON HIS WAY AT THE OUTSET OF HIS MINISTRY AS HE PRAYS. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT CARES AND CONCERNS HE WALKED INTO THE JORDAN RIVER WITH THAT DAY, BUT WE DO KNOW THAT HE ROSE UP FROM THE RIVER HAVING THE ASSURANCE THAT AS HE PRAYED THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED AND THE HOLY SPIRIT CAME TO ACCOMPANY GOD'S BLESSING.

THROUGH THIS POWER HE COULD LEAVE THE RIVER AND ENTER INTO THE WILDERNESS TEMPTATIONS THAT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED, AND THEN MAKE THE LONG HARD JOURNEY FROM THE JORDAN TO JERUSALEM, AND ALL THAT

WAS WAITING FOR HIM THERE. HE WAS BLESSED BY GOD AND IMMEDIATELY WENT INTO THE DESERT TO DO BATTLE WITH THE DEVIL.

WE AS CHRISTIANS VENTURE ONTO THE ROAD GOD HAS SET BEFORE US BY FIRST BEING BLESSED AT OUR OWN BAPTISM, WHERE WE ALSO, AND REMARKABLY, HEAR GOD'S AFFIRMATION OF US AS HIS CHILDREN.

WE ARE BLESSED, MARKED WITH THE SIGN OF HIS CROSS AND SEALED BY HIS HOLY SPIRIT THAT WE MAY KNOW THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED TO LAY CLAIM ON US AS HEIRS TO GOD'S KINGDOM.

AND AS HEIRS, WE WILL BE CALLED UPON TO DEFEND THE KINGDOM IN WORD AND TRUTH. WE WILL BE CALLED TO JOURNEY THROUGH OUR OWN WILDERNESS TIMES, BUT KNOW THIS – THE FATHER HAS ALREADY SPOKEN – EVEN BEFORE ONE STEP HAS EVER BEEN TAKEN – TO LAY CLAIM ON YOU, AS HIS BELOVED. YOU. ARE. HIS.

WHETHER YOUR STEPS ON THE JOURNEY ARE BOLD OR FALTERING, WANDERING OR SURE, HE HAS CLAIMED YOU BEFORE YOU TOOK ONE STEP. THAT YOU MAY KNOW BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT TO WHOM YOU BELONG.

LET US GIVE THANKS TODAY FOR THE GIFT OF GOD'S UNENDING GRACE, MERCY, AND BLESSING, THROUGH THE WATERS OF BAPTISM, AND THE POWER OF HIS WORD.

LET US BE CONSTANT REMINDERS TO ONE ANOTHER ON THIS KINGDOM ROAD TO FLY IN THE FACE OF THE DEVIL AND SAY "I AM BAPTIZED", THAT WE MAY NOT SUCCUMB TO THE WAYS OF HIS WORLD, AND LET US PROCLAIM TO THE WORLD BY WORD AND DEED THAT THE HEAVENS ARE OPENED TO ALL WHO CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD, AND THAT KINGDOM POWER CAN CHANGE THE WORLD. IN JESUS NAME. AMEN!