

## YOU ARE MINE

**TEXT:** Isaiah 43:1-7 and Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.” For me, there are no words more reassuring, more promising, more enduring than these words from the Prophet Isaiah.

I wonder if Jesus also knew these marvelous words first spoken to a people in exile. I wonder if he heard them echoing in his mind and heart as he waded into the Jordan River to be baptized by John. I wonder if these marvelous strains of promise carried him through the uncertain times of his ministry and if even as he experienced God abandoning him, if on the cross he somehow heard them, too. You are mine! Indeed, for all the ways the world had changed since those words were first spoken and for all the ways the world has changed since, these words of God’s promised love and protection still speak.

Luke’s telling of the baptismal story (it is recorded in all four Gospels, by the way), focuses on identity. As in Mark, the voice from heaven is addressed to Jesus in the first person: “*You* are my Son, the beloved; with *you* I am well pleased”. Baptism teaches us who we are – God’s beloved children – and confers upon us the promise of God’s unconditional love. In an era when so many of the traditional elements of identity have been diminished – we change jobs and careers with frequency, most of us have had multiple residences rather than growing up and living in a single community, fewer families remain intact – there is a craving to figure out just who we are. In response to this craving and need, baptism reminds us that we discover *who* we are in relation to *whose* we are, God’s beloved children. We belong to God’s family, and baptism is a tangible sign of that.

I believe that is why it is important to remember the words of Isaiah. “Do not be afraid, says the Lord,” because Isaiah knew that the Lord who spoke those words is not some distant deity, some impersonal force loose in the universe, a god pulling the strings

of history. God is more like a mother who listens in the night for the cries of her children. “Do not be afraid, says the Lord. I created you. I formed you. I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.”

The God of Israel, the God whose story is told in this scripture always calls us by name: Adam, Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Samuel, Mary. This is the God we see in the face of Jesus Christ. The God who walks along the shore and calls by name: “Peter, Andrew, John, follow me.”

This is the God who knows your name, who knows the number of the hairs on your head, the God who remembers you and does not forget you, the God who, even when the winds howl and the seas roar, listens for your voice, knows your cry, and says to each of us, Do not be afraid. I know you. I have called you by name. I am coming to help you. You are mine.”

I believe that the story of Jesus’ baptism has been misleading many of us. It assumes that Jesus knew he was sinless, or was conscious of his status, when he was baptized. But what if we read this story in light of our lack of information of Jesus up to this point in his life? With the exception of the story about Jesus in the Temple as a 12-year old, we are extremely light on the details of his life before his baptism. It would appear that Jesus came down to the Jordan River that day to see and hear John the Baptist. He was moved by John’s proclamations, decided that he wanted to be part of John’s movement, and went down into the water with everybody else to be baptized.

But when he came up out of the water, something happened. He looked into heaven, he saw the Spirit of God descending and entering him, and he heard God’s voice saying to him, “You are my Son, my beloved; in you I am well pleased.”

What happened in the Jordan River was the defining event of Jesus’ life, up to this point. This is his coming out party, his debut, his “burning bush” moment. From this time forward, Jesus begins to live into the reality of who he is. He begins to understand

more and more about his calling and his task; he starts to speak and act with authority. This was when he knew the call upon his life – when he heard God say “You are mine”.

I believe that God has called every one of us - man, woman, child – to a life full of meaning, fulfillment and grace. Each life has its own special divine calling. You are the only one who can follow it. You are the one chosen by God to fulfill God’s own particular mission. It’s a high calling.

Now, a question for you. Do you remember your baptism? If you are like me – that is, if you were baptized as a baby – the answer is probably “no”. All I have is a box in the cedar chest that contains a little blue dress and a church bulletin dated “Palm Sunday 1936”. Do you remember any stories about your baptism that your parents or others present have told you over the years?

I ask and tell you this in response to one of the very vexing contradictions of our present life together in the church. First a truth: We confess that baptism is the pivotal event in the life of a Christian. Second, most of us have no memory of our baptism, no clear idea of what it means or why it’s important, and no active sense of how it might shape our daily lives. In fact, I’d be willing to go so far as to say that most of us almost *never* think about our baptism with the exception, perhaps of when we see a baptism at church or one of our family members or close friends is having a child baptized.

So this morning I would like us to remember our Baptism. We are often told that we should remember this event, but how do we do that when there is no recollection. So today I am inviting each of us to remember and affirm our baptism - the covenant that our parents and/or sponsors made for us on that day. You have in your bulletin a liturgy for the Affirmation of the Baptismal Covenant. This allows you to reaffirm the vows that were made for you at your baptism. Now these vows are yours.

As we sing “Are Ye Able”, I invite you to come forward and dip your fingers in the baptismal font. You may then touch your forehead, make the sign of the cross, or any

other sign you might choose, then return to your seat to reflect on the significance of your baptism.

Through the prophet Isaiah God declared to each of you, “You are mine”. Today we rejoice in that promise. As the voice of God spoke on the day Jesus was baptized, God speaks to us in our baptism, saying, “You are my beloved. You are mine!”