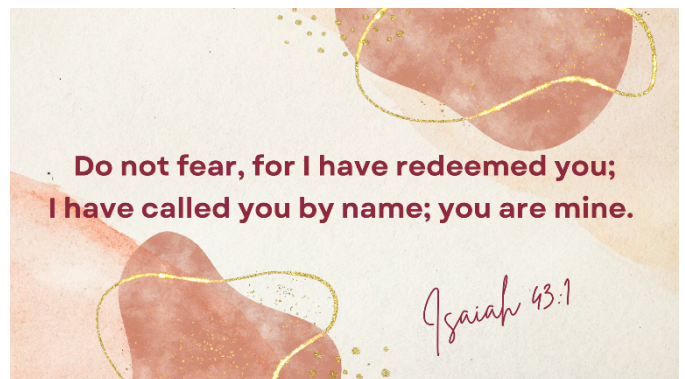


Grace & peace to you from God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Beloved Son.

Today's reading comes from the prophet Isaiah and it is so **beautiful**. I just **LOVE** this passage. It has long been one of my favorites – and here's why: in just a few short verses of prophetic poetry, we receive so many **amazingly powerful words** of love and promise from God. And these words are not spoken in generality – like some other places in scripture – for example "God so loved the world." That is **good** news, don't get me wrong. But the specificity of God speaking directly **to us** makes me pay attention differently.

God says,

"Do not fear, I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name; You are  
mine"



Me?!?! Really?!?!

These words speak exactly to my insecurities, doubts and fears. I would imagine **it might be** the same for you. Whether you fear that you are not enough, or **alone**, or worthless. Or maybe your voices of doubt tell you that you're **a nobody**, unlovable, or spineless ... or whatever it is you are just waiting for me to say...

God knows **all those vulnerabilities** that we carry around – and seems to speak directly to them. So let's take a deep breath together \*inhale\* and hear these words of promise spoken to us through the prophet. Isaiah reminds us of some incredible things.

God has created and formed us. **Us!**

We need not **fear** – for God has redeemed us.

We are **known** by God – called by name and claimed by God's promises.

When we face trials – God says, "I will be with you" and we are not left alone to deal with life's moments of difficulty, challenge, or overwhelm.

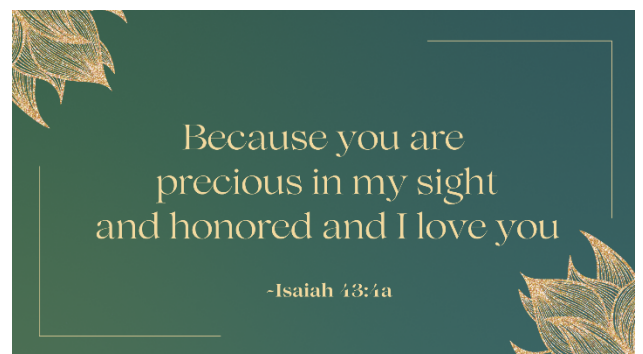
All of these words of assurance can be transformative when we take them to heart. When we have the audacity to actually believe them in the face of all the less- trustworthy voices telling us the opposite.

In the very center of the poem, God says these tender words of love:

"Because you are precious in my sight  
And honored and I love you."

"Because you are precious in my sight  
And honored and I love you."

God doesn't say "because you've worked really hard for this". Or "because you really deserve it." These words give us insight into God's gentle and loving view of us - like a parent who loves their child from their first breath, first touch, first glance.



It isn't honor or love based on any sort of merit, or good decision, or luck, or hard work. Simply because God's unconditional love for God's children – we are beloved. Precious. Honored.

Because I love you.

And just when you begin to doubt what you just heard – those promises are repeated. We're reminded of those words of promise that may sound almost too-good-to-be-true.

Do not fear.  
I am with you.  
You are called by my name.  
I created and formed you.

This same voice of God and these same kinds of promises are proclaimed in the **thunderous voice** of God from the heavens at Jesus' baptism in the gospel of Luke. God the Father says "You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." – and remember these words of God's unconditional love are spoken publicly **before** Jesus began any of his public ministry.

Today we celebrate all those who have been baptized here at Faith over the last year and we remember our own baptisms. If you are pondering being baptized,

please talk to me or Pastor John. So today, I have the honor, like in the poetry of Isaiah – to repeat these words of promise that come to us in baptism and to **remind you.**

“God has called you by name.  
You are God’s.”

Now as I studied this beloved scripture from Isaiah, I had an astonishing realization. These words were not spoken to Isaiah – a chosen and anointed prophet of Israel. They were spoken **by God, through the prophet to** the gathered community of Israel. The prophet addresses the community in the opening verse as, “O Jacob, O Israel.”

Even though these are powerful words for us to hear and believe for ourselves (which is certainly valid and an absolutely valuable way to hear). These words were not spoken to the individual “you” or even to the plural “y’all.” Bear with me here, because I know this is a bit nerdy – but they were spoken to the singular you.<sup>1</sup> You, Jacob. You, Israel. You-the-community. You, people of God. You, Faith Lutheran.

And even more – Isaiah’s hearers were **living in exile** in Babylon after the conquest of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> These people had been forced to flee from their homes

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf Jacobson, Sermon Brainwave #1002: Baptism of Our Lord (C) – Jan. 12, 2025, Workingpreacher.org/podcast. Accessed 1/8/2025.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Gaiser, “Background of Isaiah” from Enter the Bible.org. Accessed 1/11/25.

and exiled to the oppressors' lands. Passing through waters or walking through fires may not have been metaphors for them, but lived experiences. Being physically separated from their children or loved ones was likely their reality. Living in fear and insecurity and feeling utterly alone – these were communal experiences of the people Israel in exile.

So these words resonate strongly today - with many **entire communities** in our world in need of God's promises and reassurance.

- Those affected by wildfires in southern California.
- The communities of unhoused Minnesotans struggling in the cold of winter.
- Ukrainian, Palestinian, Israeli, Syrian, Lebanese and so many other people driven from their homes or living in the face of violence.
- The people suffering through unrest in Mozambique, Syria, and Haiti.
- People living in refugee camps around the world.

For communities of people **enduring incredible hardship** – these words aren't only comforting insecurities, doubts and fears. For these, God is providing a lifeline. A foundation of hope. An assurance that in the extreme circumstances they are surviving together – they **are known - and loved - and promised** the presence of God with them through it all. As a community – each matters to God. Each is precious, and honored, and loved.

Deacon Nina Joygaard  
Isaiah 43:1-7 & Luke 3:15-17, 21-22.  
January 12, 2025

6 | Page

Just as **we** are precious, honored, and loved.

And **you** are precious, honored, and loved.

Amen & thanks be to God.