

Sermon – “You are Mine”

Sunday, January 13, 2019

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7, Luke 31:21-22

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Today’s Isaiah passage is equivalent to a modern-day love confession made by God. After identifying all the disobedience and mistrust by the Israelites, God does not back down from the relationship, but doubles down for them, and even to us today. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

But now thus says the LORD,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;

and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,

and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

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.

Do not fear, for I am with you;

I will bring your offspring from the east,

and from the west I will gather you;

I will say to the north, “Give them up,”

and to the south, “Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away

and my daughters from the end of the earth—

everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made.”

Our second reading of Scripture comes from Gospel of Luke 3:15-17, 21-22. Prepare the hearts to receive the Word of the Lord.

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Amen.

The title of the sermon: “You are Mine”

The text: But now thus says the Lord... Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. Isaiah 43:1

Please join me in a prayer: God of mercy, you are a champion of second chances. Help us remember who we are through your Holy Spirit that we may navigate this new year, new beginning, and renewed lives. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It is my unscientific observation that the first few weeks of the new year is most liked by general public. Unlike the rest of the year and holidays, there seems to be more optimism during this season than any other. There is hope of what the future will bring, as we veer into the uncertainty of a new year. We begin with a clean slate with dreams that we want to achieve throughout the year. As each day goes by, however, we begin to judge what the rest of a year might look like as the empirical data of past days of the new year gives an outlook of what our future might hold.

The world seems to be telling us much of the same lie of how we view the year to who we are; that our identity is defined by what we have accomplished - more importantly what we did not achieve - and that our future is limited inversely proportional to our failures of the past. While the world is trying to make us captives of yesterday, the gospel is telling us we are people of tomorrow. We are called not to be bound by our fears and sins we have committed in the past, but look forward to the promise of God in our lives. It is just like this imagery once told by a pastor to me.

Take out a bill, any bill from your wallet. Look at mine for example. With it, I can exchange this note with a commodity that is considered an equal value. The value of the note does not depreciate based upon its condition or where it has been. If I drew few zeroes after the printed value, it would not change the worth of this paper. If I were to crumple it, it would still be the same bill. Take few steps further and take it, step on it, put it through the mud, it doesn't change the value. In fact, even when we rip it in half and tape it back, it doesn't change a thing.

Same goes for us. According to today's Isaiah passage, no matter what and where we have been, our worth and value does not change to God. God created us, God formed us, and God redeemed us; God called us by our name, saying “you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1). Our value in God's eyes will never be changed, and if we are endorsed by God, what can hinder us?

Therefore, we celebrate Jesus' baptism, the beginning of redeemer's ministry, today. Through Jesus' baptism, we also celebrate our own baptism, as we are forever grafted to Jesus for both death and resurrection of our lives. At our baptism, we confess the death of our old-selves, and starting a new by putting on Christ. As we step into the dawn of 2019, we do it with faith, that our past and sins are all forgiven through the promise of

Jesus' new covenant, sealed in the redeemer's blood. As we reaffirm our baptisms today, we rededicate our lives.

It is like my experience at the student union during my college days. It was before any modernization of the bowling alley, and everyone who bowled there had to score by hand on a 11x17 paper that was being magnified by an overhead projector. One thing that was beneficial being a manual tech is making the scoreboard essentially your own. One can bring creativity, artistic ability, and even make notes to remind oneself about what to do next. I am sure that many of us have done what I am about to describe next. Whenever I was doing bad in the previous frames, I would 'reframe' the game in my mind by drawing a dark line between my last frame and the one that is coming up – creating a new beginning within the same game.

Friends, we have the opportunity to draw a thick line in our lives today. Most of us have been baptized, yet we are fallen short of living our lives in accordance to God's calling. Some of us has a strong tug of God's calling on our hearts to be baptized or be a member of a church, yet have not done it out of fear of commitment. As John the Baptist reminds us today through the Scripture, Jesus does not baptize us with water, but with the Holy Spirit. As we reaffirm our baptism, God is calling each of us by name, saying 'You are my son, you are my daughter, [you are] my beloved. With you I am well pleased.'¹

God is pleased not because we are perfect. God is pleased because we recognized that we are God's. Our lives are not complete just being ourselves. We are only complete when God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are in our lives. Jesus, Son of Man, and also Son of God, exemplified what it means to be obedient to the calling by being baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus gave us a way to be connected through the waters that not only cleanse us but seal us whenever we ask. So friends, our lives are not simply we can do on our own whim, but we must answer God's calling in our lives. We must follow the act of humble obedience that Jesus has shown for all of us to follow. Today, as we take the reaffirmation of baptism, let us give thanks, for the grace we have received and the second chance that we can live our lives according to the calling that God placed on our hearts – today and for the rest of the year – until we see Jesus face to face. Amen.

¹ Matthew 3:22