

**Isaiah 43:1-3a (The Baptism of Our Lord—Series C)**

**“Do Not Fear—You are Mine”**

**Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT**

**January 9, 2022**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is from the Old Testament Lesson for the Baptism of Our Lord recorded in Isaiah 43:

<sup>1</sup>And now thus says Yahweh, who created you, O Jacob, and who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, because I am redeeming you; I am calling you by name; you are mine. <sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I am with you, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep you away. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned, and a flame will not scorch you. <sup>3</sup>Because I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”

Fear. It is an appropriate topic to address right now as our society, and perhaps even you yourself, are living in fear because of the SARS-Cov-2 virus and its current variant that is so very prevalent. Fear disrupts a person’s life and physical, mental, and emotional health. As Christians, we are to be “wise as serpents,” Jesus says, as we live as sheep among the wolves of the world (Matt 10:16). We’re to be smart, using our God-given common sense and the wisdom that He gives through the medical arts. We are not to be cavalier about the pandemic or careless in our actions. Nor are we to be so afraid, paralyzed by fear, that we cannot live out our God-given callings in life.

Fear, however, is a part of our fallen, corrupt human nature. Its origin can be traced to Adam after the Fall in Genesis 3: “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ And [Adam] said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and **I was afraid**, because I was naked, and I hid myself’” (Gen. 3:8–10 ESV). After that terrifying

moment in the Garden, the human race has lived with the constant possibility and even the threat of being afraid. And we are afraid of many things, aren't we? Just look at the list of phobias, from the Greek word meaning "fear."

I have become more confident in my understanding that "fear" is a tool of Satan that he uses to drive us away from God. In his 1527 pamphlet, *Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague*, Pastor Martin Luther wrote, "[Satan] is such a bitter, knavish devil that he not only unceasingly tries to slay and kill, but also takes delight in making us deathly afraid, worried, and apprehensive so that we should regard dying as horrible and have no rest or peace all through our life. And so the devil would excrete us out of this life as he tries to make us despair of God, become unwilling and unprepared to die, and, under the stormy and dark sky of fear and anxiety, make us forget and lose Christ, our light and life, and desert our neighbor in his troubles. We would sin thereby against God and man; that would be the devil's glory and delight."<sup>1</sup>

Luther was realistic. Like you and I, he knew that even as Christians we are not immune from suffering. There's no vaccination for that! God says through Isaiah, "When you pass through the waters . . . . when you walk through fire." In the Scriptures, water and fire taken together form a picture of every danger that could come. These words signify trials, including the trials and troubles that the Christian will face in living life in the fallen, corrupted creation. We are subject to disease. We are exposed also to death. It is as if God were saying

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 127.

through the prophet Isaiah: "There is no one who is not after you. Thus you are in water and fire . . . But do not be afraid, you are My creature, and for that reason, on My account, the world does not put up with you. Yet nothing can harm you."<sup>2</sup>

No one wants to get sick. No one wants to suffer the effects of COVID, flu, cancer, dementia, or any other disease or affliction. No one wants to go through hospitalization. And we certainly do not welcome death, for we know that it is the last enemy to be destroyed at the Coming Again of the Lord Christ. But the devil wants to you be afraid. The devil wants to you see in this pandemic and all the other messed-up events in life that things have just gotten out of God's control. And when you come to believe that, you will be deathly afraid of everything in this life. When you believe that God is no longer Lord, then life can only be a life of fear, hopelessness, and despair.

You and I are not exempt from suffering. We are not free from anxiety and worry. We're not even immune from being afraid. But it is when we are overcome by the things that cause us fear in this mortal life that we are empowered by the Spirit through the Good News Words of our God who is Lord as He says, "Do not fear, because I am redeeming you; I am calling you by name; you are mine." Nothing is out of God's control. Even this pandemic is not outside of God's power and authority. The world wants you to believe that it is. The devil wants you to think that God's doesn't have this one under control. Our sinful natures want to buy into that. But the Lord of Creation intercepts fear's offensive and shuts it down. "I am the

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 17: Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 17 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 85-87.

God who created you. I am the God who formed you. Do not fear, because I am the God who is redeeming you from all fear. I am the God who is calling you by name. You are mine! Not the devil's; not the world's—Mine!"

Naming is claiming, a claim of ownership. You do not belong to Satan and his fear. You do not belong to the world and its fear. You don't belong to death and its fear. You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11 ESV). Baptism affixes the name of the triune God on you.

To claim you as His own sons and daughters, God the Father sent His One-of-a-Kind Son, Jesus, to be our Redeemer and our Savior. He promises to you in His Word, "I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Jesus is God in human flesh who bought you back from Satan, sin, fear, and death. God's Son Jesus paid the whopping price for you and me: His own death and damnation on a cross. In Baptism, you receive the fruits of Jesus' cross and resurrection, namely the forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation. In the baptismal flood, Yahweh claimed you, and on a hill called Calvary, He paid for you with His Son Jesus.

When God says to you, "You are Mine," He's saying to you, "You belong to Me because I made you. And you belong to Me because I redeemed you through the blood of Jesus, My Son. You are Mine twice!" In other words, God says to you, "You are *really* Mine." And if we are His, then He is ours, our God, our Lord, our Savior. He is Emmanuel—God with us in the midst of our fears and sufferings. Things have NOT gotten out of God's control. In your affliction you are not alone. God is with you through His Son Jesus Christ by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit whom He has poured out upon you in Baptism.

Because we know that it is the devil's game to induce fear and dread, in the Gospel power of our Baptism into Christ, as Luther said, "we should in turn minimize it, take such courage as to spite and annoy him and send those terrors right back to him. And we should arm ourselves with this answer to the devil: 'Get away, you devil, with your terrors! . . . No, you'll not have the last word! If Christ shed his blood for me and died for me, why should I not expose myself to some small dangers for his sake and disregard this feeble plague? If you can terrorize, Christ can strengthen me. If you can kill, Christ can give life. If you have poison in your fangs, Christ has far greater medicine. Should not my dear Christ, with his precepts, his kindness, and all his encouragement, be more important in my spirit than you, roguish devil, with your false terrors in my weak flesh? God forbid! Get away, devil. Here is Christ and here am I, his servant in this work. Let Christ prevail! Amen.'"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 127–128.