

January 9, 2022
The Baptism of our Lord
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Isaiah 43:1-7 (Luke 3:15-22; Romans 6:1-11)

THE LOVE THAT ONLY OUR HEAVENLY FATHER CAN LOVE.

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

Our text for meditation today comes from the prophesy of Isaiah, the 43rd chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Perhaps you are familiar with the rude and belittling idiom: ***“That person is someone only a mother could love.”*** It’s an exaggeration that implies the individual has some great inferiority that only the mother who carried him/her in her womb, in her unconditional, never-ending love, could find them as precious and cherish them. And while that pejorative statement is rude and belittling – this morning I would suggest that you and I are worse than that! Due to our sin and transgression, we are far beyond offensive and unlovable – that not even our mothers should love us. The only one who can truly love you is the One who formed you in your mother’s womb. It’s the love that only our heavenly Father can love.

The Lord God called His prophet Isaiah to proclaim God’s message of Law and Gospel, repentance and faith, to the people of Israel. The people had rejected the Lord’s perfect love and chose idolatry and sin. While claiming to fear, love, and trust in the one true God, they rebelled against Him, chased after false gods, and offered their sacrifices to Him in vain. The Lord had once tolerated their unfaithfulness but grew weary of their actions. Because they ***would not*** repent to return to Him, the Lord would turn His hand against them and allow them to be destroyed by their enemies. (cf: Isaiah 1:1-25)

God’s Gospel message of grace and mercy was that – even though death and destruction would come upon God’s chosen people, He would not annihilate them. The Lord promised to preserve a remnant of people through whom He would establish a new kingdom which would be ruled by the Shoot from the stump of Jesse, whom we know as the Messiah, Christ Jesus. (cf: Isaiah 11:1-11) This means that Isaiah’s prophesy to Israel is also the Lord’s prophesy to you and me today.

In the verses prior to our Old Testament reading this morning, (cf: Isaiah 42:18-25) Isaiah holds up the mirror of God’s Law to show His people their conceit and stubbornness so they might recognize their guilt, saying:

“Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned...? ...[but] they would not walk [in His ways] ... [and His] Law they would not obey.” (Isaiah 42:24)

The people had a history of feigning repentance and ignoring the Lord's threats. But the Lord made it clear that the guilt was entirely their own so that those who lived to be deported into exile might know that it **was not** the foreign invaders who were responsible for their captivity. It was their own fault, the consequence of their sin against God. He authorized their punishment. The Lord would pour out judgment on His own people.

Immediately after preaching the Law in its full sternness, in our text, the Lord announces His grace in the full sweetness of the Gospel. Even though they were unlovable and turned their backs on God – God would not forsake them. They would be punished for their sins, but He reminds them that He will gather them together once more as His people and restore His Kingdom.

You and I have much in common with the Israelites. Because of your sin and transgression, you are far beyond offensive and unlovable – so much that not even your own mother should love you. But the Lord's Word to the Israelites is His Word to you. In verse 4 He says:

"... you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you..." (Isaiah 43:4)

It's the love that only our heavenly Father can love. If you read through Isaiah's prophecy, you'll see that at no point do God's people make any effort to reform, repent, or improve their ways. They neither **seek** nor **deserve** the Lord's grace. But – He alone is merciful. He is gracious for His name's sake. (cf: Isaiah 48:11) You have His Word. You are precious in the Lord's eyes. While in this world you will have trials and tribulations, sickness, disease, and even face death and the deaths of loved ones, in our text, the one who formed you in your mother's womb says:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."
(Isaiah 43:1)

"... you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you..." (Isaiah 43:4)

God is speaking directly to you. In the original language, every instance of "**you**" and "**your**" in our text is singular. (over 20 of them) It's you. Not "**you all**" or "**all y'all**." God is speaking to you! It's His intimate, individual, and personal message to you. It's the love that only our heavenly Father can love, the One who truly loves unconditionally for the sake of His Son.

Similar to Isaiah, John the Baptist warns of God's righteous judgement against sin. John compares it to a farmer threshing wheat where the grain is separated from the chaff. (cf: Luke 3:17) Just as the farmer saves the wheat from the harvest, God will save His people, all who confess Jesus as Savior, and will gather them to Himself in heaven. But the chaff, those secure in unbelief, have no value and is burned. It's a picture of all strong-willed men, women, and children living confident and secure in self-centered sinfulness and refuse to repent and believe. The Father will throw them into the unquenchable fire of eternal damnation.

Your heavenly Father despises your sin and the mess you make of your life. You rebel against Him, chase after false gods, and offer your sacrifices to Him in vain. Even though you do not deserve our Lord's grace, He's a loving Father by His very essence. You are precious in His eyes, honored, and He loves you. To draw you nearer to Himself, He allows you to suffer the consequences of living as a sinner in a sinful world.

But thanks be to God, He no longer pours out His wrath on the world like He did in the Old Testament days. In His foreknowledge, He knew that because of our sinful nature, you and I could never obey His rules and keep His commandments perfectly as He demands. So rather than throw you into the fire with the chaff, in His divine Fatherly love and mercy, He sent you a Substitute. One who would live the perfect life that He demands and suffer the consequences of your sin.

While Old Testament Israel had the promise of the coming Messiah, you have the prophesy fulfilled. They were saved by trusting in the One who was promised to come. You are saved by the One who has come, who redeemed you, and called you by name. God poured out His righteous judgment on Israel for their sin, allowing them to be destroyed by their enemies. But on Calvary's cross, God poured out His entire wrath and judgment against the sin of the world upon His only begotten Son.

Beginning His earthly ministry, Jesus comes to be numbered with sinners in the Jordan River to deliver mankind from their sins. He places Himself under God's wrath as your substitute, taking His place as a sinner alongside of sinners, even though He committed no sin.

After being Baptized and while Jesus was praying, the gate to heaven is opened. It's an epiphany. Jesus' true identity is made manifest. The One born of a virgin, is God's own Son. He's visibly anointed by the Holy Spirit. And like any proud earthly father, God the Father in heaven proclaims the consequence of Jesus' coming work of salvation saying:

"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

The presence of the Father and the Spirit at Jesus' Baptism affirms that Jesus is the Son of God and that He's worthy to be your Substitute, accomplishing salvation on behalf of all mankind. His **water** Baptism in the Jordan was the beginning of His journey to His **bloody** baptism on Calvary's cross. (cf: Luke 12:50) Every bit of the Father's wrath against your willful disobedience was **poured** onto the Son on the cross – as Jesus willingly **poured** out His blood for you.

For Jesus' sake, all who come to the Father in contrition and repentance receive His forgiveness. You no longer need fear God's righteous judgement – but have a sure confidence that by His grace, you will enter His eternal kingdom on Judgement Day. (cf: 1 John 4:13-21) God declares to you:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."
(Isaiah 43:1)

"... you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you..." (Isaiah 43:4)

In Baptism, God called you by name. You were marked as one redeemed by Christ the crucified and God claimed you as His own child. St Paul says it this way:

"... all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4)

Your newness of life is an undeserved consequence. Apart from Jesus, you and I are unlovable. But in Christ, you are given a new life by the grace of God, given by the Father for the sake of His dear Son. He bestows upon you all the gifts that Christ won on the cross on your behalf: namely, forgiveness, life, and salvation. As His child, you no longer need to fear His wrath, but anxiously await His return to carry you into His storehouse of eternal life.

In Baptism you received the consequence of Jesus' work. At the font Jesus baptized you with the Holy Spirit, purifying you of your sin, enabling you to withstand the assaults and temptation of the evil one. Enabling you to flee from your sin and live a God-pleasing life. Remembering your Baptism, He bids you to be faithful in your calling as His child. In our Collect of the Day we prayed that our Father in heaven would:

“Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life.” (cf: Collect of the Day, Baptism of our Lord)

Like St Paul said:

“How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:2)

Your heavenly Father has called you to:

“... walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10)

Bearing fruit not because it adds anything to Jesus' work of salvation, but bearing fruits of love because Christ first loved you. Bear fruits of contrition and repentance. Fruits of prayer and thanksgiving. Fruits of good works toward others. Fruits of God pleasing Christian formation of your children, and sharing with your neighbor the Good News of the love that only our heavenly Father can love, His love for people who deserve the exact opposite.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.