

ISAIAH 43:1-7
BUT NOW . . .

There's a transition in our reading from God promising to be with us in the future when bad things happen to us, to God saying that He is with us now. He will take care of us, because we already belong to Him now. He will be with us, because He's already with us now. That's how our reading begins, with those words, "But now ..."

Bad things may have happened to you in the past, actually unless you've been extremely privileged a lot of bad things have happened to you by now, but now God is with you. If we in the now take our eyes off of those bad things that have happened to us, and those bad things that are talked about in our text that had happened to the nation of Israel, this lesson is full of Good News.

At the end of chapter forty-two before our text the kingdom of Judah is known as a bunch of worthless sinners who stand under the fiery judgement of God. They had been plundered and sold into Babylonian slavery because of their idolatry. However, our text starts the very next chapter with a radical shift from enslaved Israelites to Israelites who now belong to the Lord God.

In a similar way we start our lives enslaved to original sin. We're conceived in sin, born in sin, we live in sin, and this shreds our lives and divides us as families, communities and churches. God's words to the Israelites are still words to us today in our own situations. God is looking at us with pleading eyes and saying, "But now ...". Don't live in the past, live in the now.

"But now thus says the LORD, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine" (v. 1). That first verse is enough for an entire sermon, but I'll touch on other parts of our text as we go along. For now we have to address when it was that you were called by name. When did God make you His own?

Well, hopefully the answer comes to you easily as it's highlighted today on this special Sunday when we remember the Baptism of our Lord. Today we celebrate Jesus' baptism, and our own baptism. When you were baptized God called you by name. It was earlier on that He redeemed you, but it was then that God said that you were His own.

Earlier on Jesus was Baptized and He took your sins upon Himself. It can be odd to our imaginations that the sins which we do today were placed upon Jesus two-thousand years ago when He was baptized, but God is outside of time, and we have to leave the understanding of His mysterious actions up to Him and just trust that it is so. And it is so now for you and I who have

been baptized. We've been redeemed, called by name, and made God's own children.

Earlier on Jesus had walked that road from His Baptism to the crucifixion. There He paid for our sins that He was carrying, and from there He brings us forgiveness of sins and salvation. When you were baptized you were united with Jesus' baptism, and with His death and resurrection.

Now, we don't say, "I was baptized.", but rather we say, "I am baptized!" Now we live under the reign of God's grace, and this grace leads us to newness of life. Now living under the reign of God's grace you may swallow your pride and maybe even forgive someone before they ask for it, because you know that Jesus has forgiven you.

This good news that confronts us today matters; it's a word of encouragement, and it affects your lives in positive ways. But, maybe, still now, you need someone to help you to see what this positive impact on your life could be like.

I've already mentioned that we inherited this thing called original sin. It enslaves us and causes us to commit actual sins against our family members, church members, and people in the community. These actual sins can leave us feeling bad about ourselves. We don't necessarily think of ourselves as having committed any sins, but we're still ashamed of what we did, or maybe failed to do when we failed to help someone. You may feel worthless, incapable of being a good person, or maybe even unlovable. You may not show those feelings to others, but inside you feel the shame, and it eats away at you.

Forget about the fear of God's punishment, you can mentally beat your own self up. "Why did I do that, say that? I know better. That was a stupid thing to do. If I could just take it back. If I could just change that one moment of weakness, that one word, that one night when I lost my virginity, that one day I lost my temper, that one time when I lied, that one moment when I should've bit my tongue and said nothing." But you can't. None of us can take those sinful, shameful, hurtful moments back.

Yet, now God speaks words of comfort and hope to us shameful sinners. Our reading is about a radical shift in identity. You may feel your shame and see yourself as a worthless sinner, but now thus says the Lord, "You are precious in My eyes, you are honoured, and I love you."

How precious are you to God? God created you! God formed you! How might you ponder those words from God to you so that this good news does have some positive impact on your life? Well, for your consideration here is part of a very long prayer by Johann Gerhard, an old Lutheran Theologian from the 1600's.

“Eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, I give you thanks, I praise You, that Your hands fashioned me, and made every detail of what I am. You shaped me like clay in the womb of my mother. You poured me out like milk, and curdled me like cheese. You clothed me with skin and knit me together with bones and tendons. You gave me life and showed me mercy and in Your providence You watched over my spirit.”

At this point in the prayer he cites Job 10:9-12. “Remember that You have made me like clay; and will You return me to the dust? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and Your care has preserved my spirit.”

Can you tell how Gerhard uses Scripture to craft his prayer as he gives thanks for His formation in the womb of his mother and for his birth and life? For the rest of his prayer he uses Psalm 139:13-18 and Psalm 22:10-11. There are many other passages in the Bible that he could’ve used, and that you can use as you reflect on this status that God has bestowed upon you of being created, formed and redeemed by Him. And now He has called you by name.

That’s how our text begins, and then this unit of text ends with these words: “Everyone who is called by My name.” Firstly, God calls you by your name, but now God calls you by His name. In baptism God placed His name upon you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At the end of each service, through me, God places His name upon you, and so He blesses you, so that you may surely rejoice.

At the end of our text God recaps that He created you and formed you, but now He tells you why. God created you for His glory. If you ever feel worthless, ashamed or down in the dumps about your life you can find your great value and a pick-me-up in the reading of our text, or the ones that Gerhard prayed.

In referring to his prayer Gerhard wrote, “The contemplation of divine gifts from the most beautiful garden of nature and the Church is like gathering together a bouquet of various fragrant flowers. The scent of these blooms refreshes the spirit and calls forth in turn the sacrifice of lips of praise, a sweet smell to God.”

Or in other words as you come to know and marvel in the fact that God created you and redeemed you from all that is sinful in this world, you’ll glorify God. You just begin to change because this is really good news to you. This good news from God to you that we call the Gospel changes you, for a better and brighter future, now and in the now of eternal life to come. Amen.