

**Isaiah 43:1-7** <sup>ESV</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. <sup>4</sup> Because you are precious in my eyes, and honoured, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. <sup>5</sup> Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. <sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, <sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

## “Called by God’s Name, Created for God’s Glory”

This passage from Isaiah is a difficult one to preach because it’s very hard to say any better or explain any better what God himself says. So I thought I would do something different today and read it over and over again and just let it sink in to us. As I read it just listen and maybe a word or thought will grasp you. If so ponder it. After I read we’ll sit silently for a minute and then we’ll sing the chorus of *The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases*.

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"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is your faithfulness, O Lord. Great is your faithfulness."

This passage is absolutely beautiful. God says to us, "I created you. I formed you. Do not fear. You are mine. I am the LORD, your God, your Saviour. I have redeemed you, yes you, at the expense of other people and peoples, indeed at the expense of dying myself. You are precious and honoured in my eyes. I love you. Do not fear for I am with you. You belong to me. You are called by my name and I have created you to bear my Presence." Take this as a word from the Lord God, the Holy Trinity, to you and to us as a congregation. Take it and own it for yourself. It pertains to you. It pertains to us. Listen again.

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I have a particular connection to this passage. Sometime not long after my first wife and I split up, I was talking with my friend Dwight who taught me to play the banjo. While we were talking he got his Bible out and opened it to this passage (really all of chapter 43) and said that many years back the Episcopal priest there in town who was a close friend of his felt led to share it with him to comfort him. Dwight then said "I give it to you now. It can be your word." He read it. Later in the chapter it says "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland" (43:18, 19). There in the midst of having lost everything (emotional and otherwise), Dwight gave me this word, these verses. It hit me deep. Instead of lost, devastated, and ashamed I truly began to feel that I belonged to God and that he does loves me and was working in me and my life on my behalf bringing about something new. He was taking all that loss, shame, and hurt and making something new from it, forming me anew. For had created me, formed me, as he has you, to bear his presence before others. For probably the first time in my life I found myself able to let the past go and not dwell on it or try to get it back. Listen again.

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The depth of life ambiguity and anxiety that follows things like death and divorce can really become disillusioning. You don't know who you are anymore or what to do. The occasion solitude that used to bring rest becomes relentless. It is very hard to be alone. I think in life that it is too easy to forget we belong to God and how much he loves us. We forget who God is. We think everything's on our shoulders and God is only interested in evaluating our performance. These verses say the complete opposite. I give you this word. Let it be your own.

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We belong to God, who is the loving communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he does not leave us to ourselves and he is not silent. He is with us. He speaks. We have no reason to fear. We are called by his name and he created us to bear his Presence. That's your, my, our constantly new reality. As that is the case, God is working in us as a congregation and individuals to bear his glory. The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod* and its basic meaning is weightiness, felt weightiness, his felt Presence. God has created and formed us to be those who bear the weightiness of his Presence and to bear it in such a way that the weight of God's love comes to bear on us and on others. That means God in his wisdom has chosen to make us to be the visible, tangible proof of his reality and ways. Take this word to heart. Whenever you doubt who you are and what God is doing in your life and even if you lose sight of God and his love for you. Turn to Isaiah 43 and read it over and over again. It is your new reality.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is your faithfulness, O Lord. Great is your faithfulness." Amen.