

Text: Isaiah 43:1

But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

A famous work of American Literature relates the story of a man named Rip Van Winkle. Rip lived a humdrum life, had a nagging wife, and, according to the author, Washington Irving, was good at attending to everyone's business except his own. One day he went out for a walk and, to make a long story short, fell asleep for 20 years. When he awoke, he had a very difficult time recognizing any thing or anybody around him. Sometime Rip Van Winkle's name comes up when people contemplate change over a period of time.

Suppose Rip lived today. Twenty years ago there no I-phones, there were no I-Pads, "Independence Day" was the big movie of the summer and many churches still made their bulletins on something called a mimeograph machine. Twenty years ago no one in the eighth grade confirmation class was born yet, I still didn't wear glasses and Princess Diana and Prince Charles got a divorce. Twenty years ago Bill Clinton was re-elected president, DVD's first came on the market and postage was \$.32. And twenty years ago people were, by and large, still respected for being a Christian and a church member.

A lot has changed since 1996. And some of that change has not been positive. Much of that change will affect us as Christians. While we still do not have to fear for our physical well-being or fear for our lives, I think it's safe to say that it is a scary world in which we live and practice our Christian faith.

In other words, it's a rough world in which our confirmands will grow up. And I also believe that this brief Word of God from Isaiah's prophecy offers us good reason to leave behind any fear and hesitation about our future as children of God. These are good thoughts to dwell on as we hear a number of confessions of faith in our congregation this morning.

God says through Isaiah:

You Belong to God!

- 1. He redeemed you.**
- 2. He named you.**
- 3. He will keep you.**

1. He redeemed you.

Isaiah lived and preached and wrote in some spiritually scary times for believers. The people had drifted away from their close relationship with God. The government had gone bad. The enemies of Israel were threatening to do great harm to them. And while there was fear around him, Isaiah also found a lot of indifference and self-centeredness among the people to whom he ministered. His call was to deliver both the bad news and the good news to God's people. The first two-thirds of Isaiah's book is a declaration of God's judgment on the unrepentant. The last third, from which this verse is taken, is a dramatic switch – a switch to a message of comfort and deliverance by an almighty and gracious God. In the face of fear and threats from the enemies, Isaiah begins this verse on a positive note. *But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, I have redeemed you . . ." (Isaiah 43:1)*

Here's what God is telling the people of Israel and Judah. "You don't have to be afraid of anything because you belong to me twice over. First of all I made you, I created you. How could you possibly think, those of you for whom I use pet names for you – Jacob and Israel – how could you possibly think that I would not care for you? And as if that isn't enough, you are mine because I bought and paid for you. I redeemed you – I bought you back at the very great price of my holy precious blood and my innocent suffering and death." In other words, God had every right to say and the people had every right to believe that they had nothing to fear.

And that is the same message of comfort that God gives us today as we live our lives as his children. He says, "**I made you and I have redeemed you. You belong to me.**" The redeeming was necessary because we and our first parents messed up the first part. God graciously made Adam and Eve in his own image, in his moral likeness – holy and without sin. But Satan convinced them that he knew better than God what was good for them and they left God and his ways behind and set out on

their own way. The Bible describes the natural state of them and all of their descendants as spiritually blind, spiritually dead, and God's enemies. We were stuck. We couldn't pull ourselves out. There is no redemption without outside help.

That is why it is so important for our God, through the prophet Isaiah, to remind us that we are redeemed. Isaiah wrote 700 years or so before Jesus accomplished our redemption with his sacrifice on Calvary's cross, but he speaks of it as a done deal. "*Fear not, I have redeemed you. . .*" For people in his day and in our day he wants to remind us that the empty cross was not always empty. For six long hours it was the scene of some of the most bitter suffering that the world has known. Jesus bore the sins of the world in his body. He shed his blood and died his death as a once-and-for-all payment for each and every sin that has been or will be committed. To use a familiar picture, Jesus paid our bill before God, and God marked it paid-in-full by raising Jesus from the grave. As a result, the scariest place in the world, the grave, has been overcome and rendered powerless. Because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God can say to each of us as he said through Isaiah, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you.*"

The very first thing that God wants every one of you to know this morning is that he is speaking to you when he says, "*Fear not, for I have redeemed you.*" He wants you to know that **you belong to God.**

Some people struggle with life and people will say, "They just can't figure out who they are." Dear friends, who you are is determined first and foremost by whose you are. That was already determined when Jesus shed his blood. And God leaves no doubt for you this morning, **You Belong to God.**

2. He named you.

When we have a day like today, when we hear the confessions of faith of a number of people who are becoming communicant members of our congregation, we might be tempted to think that today they are also becoming a part of God's family. But Isaiah's beautiful words remind us that such a happy event actually took place before today. God says, "*Fear not, I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name.*" Think about that for a minute. Do you ever remember God calling out your name in the night and telling you by direct revelation that **you belong to him?** If you say yes, I'm going to have to question your truthfulness. God doesn't work like that. But it also doesn't mean that God is not being truthful when he says, "*I have summoned you by name.*" **God did name you!**

It happened in a rather unassuming way. Maybe God called you by name many years ago when you were a very small child. Maybe he called you by name more recently. Maybe it happened in Lutheran church, or a different church, or in your home, or in a hospital. Whenever and wherever it happened, God called you by name in the water of Holy Baptism. When a pastor or another Christian placed three small amounts of water on your head with the words, "**I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,**" God was placing his family name on you just like your parents name was placed on you at your birth. And just like your naming by your parents made you a member of their family, God brought you into his family when he placed his name on you at baptism.

Please remember the day God named you. Sometimes parents will encourage their children to act wisely and correctly when they are public so they "don't harm the family name." How much more important is it, then, to live every day of our lives in a way that shows that we know our actions reflect on our God? I often remind my classes about something Dr. Martin Luther once wrote. He said, "Do not say, 'I have been baptized.' Say, 'I am baptized.'" That confession shows that we know every day of our life whose we are. It shows that we understand that Holy Baptism is not something we did for God. Rather, it is a precious sacrament through which he gave great blessings to us – he forgave our sins, he saved us from the clutches of the Devil, and **he named us** with his own name. As a result, the Good News is and continues to be, **You Belong to God.**

3. He will keep you.

There's one more thing that we don't want to miss in Isaiah's words this morning. In this beautiful invitation from our God he reminds us that he made us, he redeemed us and he named us. And he adds one final thought. *But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.* People say that the difference between a home owner and a renter is that generally the home owner will take better care of the property because it belongs to them. God says, "*You are mine.*" Do you hear that. **You Belong to God.**

If I can share a couple more verses from this chapter, I think it will help you understand what your God is saying to you today. *When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. 3 For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isaiah 43:2-3)* Did you ever try walking through a rushing mountain stream? If you ever do, my advice is “have something to hold on to.” Have you ever walked through a campfire? I don’t recommend it, but if you do, do it very quickly. God uses those pictures to tell us that we will have some tough spots in life to go through. And best of all, he promises to be there to protect us. **He will keep you.**

And God has some unique ways of carrying out that promise. He will keep you through your knowledge of and your growth in His Word. Your confirmation instructions are not a completion of anything. At best, they are a beginning of what needs to be a lifelong effort to “*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” And your God will keep you through his church. Through faith you are a part of the Holy Christian Church. God will bless you through that fellowship. But specifically today, a number of you are becoming a part of the church family known as Trinity Lutheran Church of Kiel. On behalf of the other members, we welcome you and pledge that we will work for you and with you to be a positive force to help you stay close to your God.

[Eighth grade confirmands, one way that God will keep you, at least over the next few years, is through your parents. I sometimes think that Christian parents think that confirmation marks the completion of something in your young persons life. If you have older children, you perhaps know what I’m going to say next. If this is your oldest, listen carefully. Today is not the end of anything, it’s the beginning of a challenging time in your young person’s life. As much as they may not want to admit it, they need Mom and Dad more than ever. They need your unconditional love. They need your non-judgmental counsel. They need you to be ready to listen at a moment’s notice. They need you to speak thoughtfully and carefully. They need you more than ever. And God will bless them through you. He will keep them through you.]

A lot of things have changed since we became God’s in Baptism. But there’s no reason to be fearful of the change. And Isaiah gives us the reason. **You belong to God. You belong to God because he redeemed you, he named you, and he promises to keep you.** May these beautiful words of God through Isaiah go with you every day of your future walk with God, *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."*

Amen.