

January 9, 2022

**“You Have Called Us By Name”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Isaiah 43:1-7

*But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
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.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, “Give them up,”
and to the south, “Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth—
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”*

Luke 3:21-22

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Sermon "You Have Called Us By Name"

Baptism is not a uniquely Christian rite. Rituals of cleansing were around for thousands of years before Jesus. Early Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Eastern religions all practiced various forms of baptism.

Similar rituals to baptism are also an important religious practice Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and thousands of indigenous religions.

In nearly every case, the washing with water represents cleansing and a movement toward holiness so that the individual worshiper may approach God(s). Of course it is, because in every culture people observed that water can clean off the dirt, wash the stink off you, make you feel new again, reborn, right? But for Christians within a couple of centuries after Jesus' death, what started as a simple public act of claiming to be a follower of Christ started being a measure by which to judge others.

Isn't that some irony, in order to formally claim to follow the one who preached non-judgment toward each other you had to pass through judgment by others to see if you were deemed worthy.

Then you had to memorize the Nicene creed, go through catechism so you would properly understand the impact of Jesus and his ways. Which included turning his nose up at religious practices. In other words you had to earn your baptism. What illogical circles we humans can create.

But here's the funny thing. Jesus hadn't done anything yet at the time of his baptism. According to the story his baptism occurs at the start of his ministry. And yet, God abundantly pours out the holy spirit on Jesus, speaks of him with pride and shows Jesus unearned grace and unconditional love from the very start.

In my scholarly, intense study and preparation for this sermon I came across a good joke: A family is riding home from church one Sunday. Their four-year-old son was dripping wet in the back seat of the car because he was just baptized that morning. Suddenly, midway home, the child bursts into tears. When his parents ask what's a matter, he sniffles "The minister who baptized me said I would be brought up in a Christian home. But I really want to stay with you guys!"

Jesus never spoke to us about being perfect or about getting it right; he always talked about God's love and grace. Yet the biggest obstacle we have to understanding God's love and grace is ourselves. The Isaiah passage is similar to Luke in that both passages portray God as so completely loving, and there is an intimacy to both as well. God doesn't just love us but knows our name and desires a relationship with each of us.

Thinking we need to be perfect, meet others' expectations of us, live up to some invisible standard, well that just isn't so. We are all God's beloved. To reclaim our baptism isn't to say, I'm one of God's chosen one, or that only my religion is my ticket to the afterlife, it is to say I am

one of God's beloved and so are you, and you and you and today I re-affirm that I am loved, whole and holy, just as I am.

If you wanted to reduce the problems of the world to one singular issue, it very well could be this. Thinking that one person, one nation or one faith has the one true answer above and far superior to anyone else. The irony again is that Jesus often reached outside his faith to strangers that needed healing, or needed to be fed or to hear that they were loved by God.

Both of the scriptures read this morning are about God's capacity for loving us, not about ours, but about God's capacity for loving us, not just in the afterlife but in the here and now. I want you to think about this as we go through another week of increasing Covid numbers, say these words to yourself anytime when or if you get low., "God has called me by name. When I pass through the waters I shall not drown. When I walk through fire I will not be burned. I am precious in God's sight." Now repeat after me if you will; "I am God's beloved. God is proud of me, God loves Me." AMEN

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When I walk through fire

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I am precious in God's sight.
I am God's beloved.
God is proud of me,
God loves me.

AMEN

REV. SUSAN DRAKE

