

**Isaiah 43v 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.*

<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,*

*Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.*

<sup>4</sup> *Because you are precious in my sight,*

*and honoured, and I love you,*

*I give people in return for you,*

*nations in exchange for your life.*

<sup>5</sup> *Do not fear, 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 them up',*

*and to the south, 'Do not withhold;*

*bring my sons from far away*

*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.'*

.....

**Luke 3v 15-17, 21,22**

<sup>15</sup> *As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, <sup>16</sup> John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'* ...

<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

.....

Prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."

.....

The promises spoken in Isaiah 43:1-7 give assurance and comfort amid uncertainty.

God speaks to a community of exiled people who have lost so much and says:

*"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine,"*

God's people have been exiled.

They have been driven away from their homes.

They don't know what is next for them.

They have been waiting for a *really* long time for deliverance and freedom and that has probably led to feelings of anxiety and deep disappointment. So God speaks to them with words of hope and comfort; He has not forgotten them or abandoned them.

Wonderfully, God does not just view the exiles as a mere group of outcasts or captives. God knows them, corporately and individually; each one, *by name*.

There is great comfort in knowing that God cares enough to know the names of each and every person in every land and every age.

From Isaiah we know that God calls to the deported community, which has experienced great loss and has been oppressed, and He

calls them precious and redeemed and assures them that He knows them all by name.

He knows them and He knows what they are experiencing and God calls them out of exile and to be returned back home.

God is telling His people, "You can go home now."

They have a journey ahead, but God is promising to be with them on the way back home.

Knowing someone's name implies having a relationship with them. It opens the door for mutual respect, acts of care and acts of kindness. When you hear that someone is in trouble, and you know their name, you might be more inclined to pray for them and / or act on their behalf.

In this case, God acts on behalf of His people.

In Isaiah's time, those in power and authority had cast the Jewish community aside and transported them away from their own safe and secure dwelling place. But that was not the end of the matter; God now calls them by name and gathers them together. God, asserts His people as loved and worthy; He promises them a future where He will be with them at every twist and turn of their journey.

Whatever is up ahead for them, God will be with them:

*"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."*

God does not promise that His people will avoid hardship or difficult times. But what He does promise them is His presence during those testing times; He will be with His people.

Difficult days, difficult circumstances are not proof that God is no longer present. They are moments and situations in which God's presence may be known and felt in ways that may surprise us.

Challenging seasons can be times when God's love travels alongside our pain, our grief and our sorrow. In the worst of all the moments in life, it can make a world of a difference to not have to be alone; to have human company, and / or know we have God with us.

The journey for the Jews (from exile into liberation) happened in community. Likewise, our journeys in life do not have to be taken alone. God gathered His people together, and God has not changed; He is still gathering people to Himself and gathering individuals into communities of faith.

God said to the exiles:

“Do not fear, 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 them up’,  
and to the south, ‘Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from far away  
and my daughters from the end of the earth...”

And God says today to us:

“Do not fear, for I am with you ....”

God is gathering people to Himself and into communities today also. He is bringing the alienated from every point of the compass into His community – His family.

Whatever is up ahead for anyone of God's people; God will be with them. Whatever is up ahead for any one of us; God will be with us.

In the same way that God called His people by name when they were in exile, God calls each one of us by name today because He knows us and He loves us and He *knows* each one of us by name, (completely).

It might seem like a simple thing that God knows our names and He remembers our names.....

People living with dementia may not remember their names at any given moment. Yet, if they grew up in the Church, they tend to remember the lyrics of hymns they sang as a child, or some of the liturgy they recited Sunday after Sunday or very commonly the Lord's Prayer. There is something about those old, long-trodden paths with God that can be found in people's memories, if just for a moment every now and then.....

God remembers our names even if we cannot. The sacred memory of God makes room for everyone.

God calls us His beloved children, (daughters and sons) even when we forget (in the midst of business and pressure) that He is our loving Father.

It is Good News for us all that when we are far from home, when we have lost our way, when we are lonely or afraid.

In loss.....

In grief.....

In hope deferred.....

God will be with us.....

Jesus knew He was God's beloved Son and that gave Him what He needed to live out His life on earth and fulfil all that was his to do.

The divine presence of God (by His Holy Spirit) is offered to us to know we are loved children of God and that God will give us the courage and strength we need for whatever lies ahead of us.

*[Andrew Pritchard-Keens]*