

You Are Mine
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Isaiah 43:1-7

¹ 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.
² 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.
³ 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.
⁴ 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.
⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
⁶ 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—
⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.’

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John 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. ¹⁷His 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.’

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and 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.’

God speaks to Israel in our reading from Isaiah, saying, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.” We may remember that Isaiah is directed at a people exiled over and over, removed from their land. What exactly does it mean to be redeemed? Those of us of a certain age may remember redeeming S&H green stamps. Turn in so many and get something in return. To redeem a person in ancient times isn’t so far from S&H stamp redemption, functionally. People would get sold into servitude to pay off a debt. Professor Kathleen M. O’Connor explains: “To be redeemed according to Israel’s law means to be bought out of human bondage by one’s kin, a close member of the extended family (Lev. 25:47-49).”¹ A family member gave something over to get you in return.

Imagine that you have been sold in order to pay off a debt. Perhaps you went willingly, giving yourself up so that the ones you love might have a chance. Maybe you didn’t; maybe you were a young, strong boy who would be of greatest value. You are taken to the home, to the land, of your master, your owner. You lose your freedom; you also lose hope. Hope of ever seeing your family again. Hope of ever seeing your home again. You may adapt to your new life but you never get used to it.

And then, one day, a familiar face appears in the fields where you are toiling, calling your name, saying “You are mine” - no longer someone else’s but your family’s once again. With those three words, you realize you will walk the familiar vineyards again. You’ll once again lay atop the roof from which you’ve watched the stars go by. Your feet will again walk the worn road which you know with your eyes closed, every rut, every curve. You will once again taste the freshness of the water from the well, to which you can go whenever you please, not only when permission is given. You will sit at the table again with your family around the unleavened bread and bitter herbs of the seder. You will rejoin the traditions of your family, of your culture, of your people. You have been reclaimed from a hopeless situation and, suddenly, every hope you could have seems alive again. Because you have been redeemed; you have been called by name; you have been told, “You are mine.”

When you were bought, “You are mine” meant you were now a possession of someone else. Your days were no longer your own, nor your work, nor your meals, nor your rest. When you were redeemed, “You are mine” meant your freedom had been bought for you and given to you as a gift. It meant the one who redeemed you had not given up on bringing you back. In reading about

¹ *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*, p. 221.

Jesus's baptism today, we are reminded of our own. Pastor W. Carter Lester describes our baptism, saying, "...in the waters of baptism, we understand that God marks us and claims us as God's children."² Put another way, in the waters of baptism, God says, "You are mine." And, in the waters of baptism, as we trust we are being washed of sin, we understand that we are being redeemed.

At Jesus' baptism, God speaks outright and says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." We have heard this story so often, in multiple gospels, multiple times, that we might just assume that God speaks these words because of all the good Jesus has done. After all, we know what follows, example after example of being right in God's eyes, examples we seek to follow in following Christ. Up to this point in Luke, though, all we have learned is that when Jesus was twelve he stayed behind in the temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions."³ Beyond that, we read that "Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor."⁴ Jesus hadn't actually "done" anything up to this point; his baptism marks the beginning of his ministry. Yet God says, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Again, we've heard this sentence in some form so many times we may have forgotten to wonder, to wonder what it means to be beloved or what it means for God to be well pleased. "Beloved" is ἀγαπητός (*agapetos*) in the original Greek, coming from the root *agape*, which is one of the ways of speaking of love. Another way to translate ἀγαπητός is "worthy of love." God says, "You are mine, worthy of love." God continues as a voice from heaven, saying, "ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα" (*en soi eudokesa*). We have read "with you I am well pleased." We could also read this as "in you I take pleasure." You are mine, worthy of love; in you I take pleasure.

I doubt it will surprise you to hear God's loving words are for us all. None of us have been sold into slavery but perhaps we've given ourselves into slavery – slavery to jobs, to the expectations of others, to addictions, to pleasing others even when it means rejecting that which makes our heart sing, that which gives us life. If you have spent your years giving your life to your job, if you have spent your years giving your life over for a life someone else thinks you should have, if you have spent your years giving up your life, God's familiar face is seeking you to tell you, "I have redeemed you; I am calling you by name, you are mine." In this season of fresh starts, what would it look like

² *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 1*, p. 222.

³ Luke 2:46.

⁴ Luke 2:52.

if you accepted the freedom of the life God has given you? That is a question worth asking, a life worth imagining.

It's not only about our relationship with God, God's relationship with us, though. Jesus-our-example has called us to love God and to love our neighbor. Who might you seek out with the gift of freedom? What if you picked one person this year to look at, each time, as worthy of love, to find the ways in which you take pleasure in him/her? What if you gave that person the freedom to be God's, to live for God's hopes and expectations and not yours? What might be redeemed between you?

It could be a family member. It could be a friend. It could be the clerk at the store whom you see every Saturday morning, and maybe it's the person who loads heavy things onto your loaf of bread in the grocery bag every Saturday. It could be **you**. Start small. One person. Looking at one person as worthy of love. Finding the ways in which you take pleasure in one person. Giving one person the freedom to be God's, to live for God's hope and expectations, not yours. For many of us, this change in thinking is a big shift and trying it all the time, with everyone, sets us up to struggle mightily. To which one person will you say "you are mine"?

Let us pray: Redeeming God, you have given us life again, redeeming us because you declare we are worthy of love. Give us the grace to do the same toward your children, our brothers and sisters. Amen.