

## January 13, 2013

*Today's readings are short, incredibly powerful statements that we are created, known and loved by God. End of story! This is good news!*

### Isaiah 43: 1-3, 5a

*This passage comes from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BC when the people of God are about to be lead out of Exile and back to Jerusalem. Their time in exile was horrific culturally and spiritually. Word that the one who will lead them to freedom is Cyrus the Persian, a feared enemy, did little to uplift them. But the powerful news from God is that they are loved, as we are loved, by God who knows us and will never let us go.*

- <sup>1</sup>But now, God's Message,  
"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you.  
I've called your name. You're mine.  
<sup>2</sup>When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you.  
When you're in rough waters, you will not go down.  
When you're between a rock and a hard place,  
it won't be a dead end—  
<sup>3</sup>Because I am God, your personal God,  
The Holy of Israel, your Savior.  
<sup>4</sup>*That's* how much you mean to me!  
*That's* how much I love you!  
<sup>5a</sup>So don't be afraid: I'm with you.

### Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

*This passage marks the dawn of a new era in human history. At the center of events is the baptism of Jesus. In the humble act of baptism, Jesus shows his obedience to God. He willingly plays his part in the unfolding of God's plan for salvation. In baptism the voice of God thunders a name... an identity... and love.*

<sup>15</sup>The interest of the people by now was building. They were all beginning to wonder, "Could this John be the Messiah?"

<sup>16</sup>But John intervened: "I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. <sup>17</sup>He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

<sup>21</sup>After all the people were baptized, Jesus was baptized. As he was praying, the sky opened up <sup>22</sup>and the Holy Spirit, like a dove descending, came down on him. And along with the Spirit, a voice: "You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.  
THANKS BE TO GOD!

## **Sermon – “Marked by God’s love”**

What marks do we bear?

I have a scar on my knee where I was bitten by a cat!

I wear the rings Rick gave me when we were engaged and married.

I bear the name of my father’s family... and the first name chosen for me by my parents at my birth.

I was baptized as an infant in the same font as my siblings and most of my cousins.

These marks are all important -> they tell you a lot about who I am, where I am from and what I believe.

It was a curious happenstance that I needed a book to read on the flight home – on a visit to the small book rack at Walgreens I chose.

Steve Berry’s, the Columbus Affair

It probes, in fiction, the very real questions posed by historians about Christopher Columbus’ Jewish roots.

What struck me as I read was the importance placed on the birth, baptism, and conversion of several of the key players in the plot.

As I read the novel I thought about this moment – Bentley’s baptism – his parent’s faith, the renewal of our baptism promises...

It made me think how easily we justify changing our minds about what we believe – what may be important one day is of little or no consequence the next... or is it?

God’s message, to the exiled people in Isaiah 43 is what Professor Pat Tull of Louisville Seminary “a preposterous word.”

“Into this despair comes a preposterous word... neither fire nor flood will separate exiles from God and God’s saving acts of grace. The passage doesn’t promise there won’t be fire and flood, but rather that they will not be faced alone, and they will not overpower the faithful.” (workingpreacher.org)

Our names, our rings, the waters of baptism assure us of who we are – that at the center of our stories is love – the love of God – the love of another.

Is there anything more triumphant or welcoming than this?

That same Holy Spirit who showed up when Jesus was plunged into the waters of baptism pops into our lives with the reassurance that there is a God who not only loves us but equips us for life and dares to walk with us on the journey.

“I have called you by your name. You are mine!”