

BUT NOW THUS SAYS THE LORD, HE WHO CREATED YOU, O JACOB, HE WHO FORMED YOU, O ISRAEL: "FEAR NOT, FOR I HAVE REDEEMED YOU; I HAVE CALLED YOU BY NAME, YOU ARE MINE."

Isn't it amazing how the sound of a voice can instantly bring calm and peace to a bad situation? A child cries out in fear in the darkness, perhaps because of the thunder or lightening, or a bad dream, or because of monsters under the bed, and the voice of a parent brings comfort to survive in a dark bedroom. When a loved one is traveling in stormy weather, the phone call that says, "I made it safely" brings instant calm. The voice of the doctor saying, "The surgery went fine," brings perfect peace after we've spent those frantic hours in the waiting room. Even as death approaches, many hang on, clinging to life in the midst of pain, holding on for that one last family member traveling to say "good-bye". It's amazing, miraculous even, how the sound of a voice can bring instant change to our emotions to bring calm and comfort and peace to a bad and scary and uncertain situation.

"Fear not, I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." Fear not. These are the words our heavenly Father spoke to a people living in the midst of the darkness and terrors and uncertainties of sin. And, these are the words your Father in heaven speaks to you as you live in the darkness and terror and uncertainty of sin.

Isaiah, because of the impenitence and unbelief of the Israelites, prophesies the coming of the Babylonian captivity. God speaks through Isaiah, looking ahead to say that even after He has permitted the emperor of Babylon to destroy Jerusalem and punish the people with captivity in the cruel, pagan land. And He speak -- not words of rebuke and

condemnation, but words of calm and comfort and peace, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you.”

You don’t have to be a captive in Babylon to know fear. Ever since Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden’s Garden because of their desire to be God, we poor sinners have known fear and known it all too well. As we grow in years, our fears are a lot more real than the bogey man under the bed. All your family and friends that came for the funeral have returned to their own homes and lives, and now you face the hours and days living alone ... in fear. You’re waiting to hear the test results from your doctor’s office about that lump or that blood work. And, you’re waiting in fear. Crime and terror attacks give us a sense of unease, and we live in fear. The children are gone. But, that also means they are alone in the big world. And we fear for them ... will they remain the faith into which they were baptized? Will they be safe?

Oh yes, and in the midst of it all, there is the father of all lies -- stirring up the waters. Did God really say that He would take care of you, send the angels to watch over you and your children? Did God really say He would open His hand and satisfy you with daily bread? Did God really say He would forgive you?

Fear. It's easy to be afraid in the darkness and terrors and uncertainties of sin. So, God says, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you.” “Redeem” means to “buy back”. That’s what God did for us in His own Son Jesus Christ.

Today, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord. The Son of God steps into the water, the heavens open and the Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove, and the voice of God speaks, “You are my beloved Son;

with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3). God the Father is well-pleased with His Son because His Son brings redemption.

To understand why Jesus was baptized, we must remember that substitution is the heart of the Gospel. God demands the life-blood of the sinner. That is the Law. But in love, He takes the life blood of the lamb in place of the life-blood of the sinner. That is the Gospel. So, at His Baptism, the Lamb of God stepped into the waters of the Jordan, to take your place. In His baptism, Jesus had the sins of all the world, the sins of every sinner, washed upon Himself.

And, the Lamb of God carries that sin to Calvary’s tree. And He’s nailed to that tree, bearing your sin. There, He gave up His spirit in death, giving His life as the sacrifice for all your sins, to pay the debt and penalty of your sin. And because He died for you, on that tree, you are forgiven, redeemed. God has bought you back from sin, death, and the power of the devil “not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death” that you may be His own, as Martin Luther says it in his Little Catechism.

God is well-pleased with His Son because, at His Baptism, He takes the sin of every sinner upon Himself and carries it to the death of the cross to bring redemption to all people. And God is well-pleased with you, because in your baptism, all your sin is washed away.

You are God’s own child because He called you by name and made you His child in the water and the Word of your baptism. At the font, it happened. The Holy Spirit created faith in you so that you rejoice, trust, and find comfort in Jesus. And, we walk by that faith in the Son of God who took on human flesh, who loved us and gave Himself for us.

You are God's own child. And yet it is so easy to forget that. And to walk, not by faith, but only by what we see with our human eyes and what the emotions of the moment tell us. With our human eyes, we see only the darkness of sin and its chaos: murders, rapes, mass shootings, terror attacks, war, injustice, abortion, so-called mercy killings, thefts, vandalism, gossip, slander, chemotherapy treatments, surgeries, coveting, greed, blizzards, droughts, and it seems the list never ends. And we are afraid. Fear fills us to the very marrow of our bones.

So the Lord your God says to you, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." God wants you to remember, cherish, be comforted, and rejoice in that victory that is yours in Christ, so He comes to you, again and again, over and over again, in Word of Peace in the absolution and in Christ's very Body and Blood, given and shed for you. In these means of grace, God comes to you again and again, over and over again, to say "Fear not, 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." On other words, have no fear, Dear Child, for you dwell in the shelter of the Most High God and I hold you in the palm of my hand.

It's amazing, miraculous even, how the sound of a voice can bring instant change to our emotions to bring calm and comfort and peace to a bad and scary and uncertain situation. And that is what the voice of God does for you, Dear Child.