

GOD SEES US THROUGH BY HIS LOVE  
1st SUN AFTER EPIPHANY

ISA 43:1-7  
JAN 10, 2016

<sup>1</sup> 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.  
<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 Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.  
<sup>4</sup> Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you,  
I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.  
<sup>5</sup> Fear not, 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 up, and to the south, Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from afar 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."

Is 2016 all you had hoped for? If so, I have to wonder  
if you hoped for much because it is far from complete.  
In Gospel reading, John seems to some people  
to be the messiah they were hoping for.  
He replies that the real Messiah is a lot more than him.  
But soon after he and God the Father & Holy Spirit  
point to Jesus as that one he is in prison.  
If you had asked John if Jesus was all he had hoped  
he may have replied, "Not yet."  
Text is written to people of Israel shortly before  
they were captured and carried off by Babylonian empire.  
God reminds them they are his special chosen people.  
Do you think this covenant has turned out to be  
all they had hoped it would be?  
Coming back to ourselves, Christmas celebration of Jesus' birth  
has again reminded us of God's wonderful gift to us  
of new birth as his own dear children.  
Is this new life all we could have hoped for?  
We have to say, "Not yet" but we are not done yet.

We don't yet see in our lives all God is doing for us  
but God is continuing to see it through. Text shows us:

GOD CONTINUES TO FORM US AS HIS PEOPLE  
GOD CONTINUES TO MAKE OTHERS HIS PEOPLE  
GOD MAKES AN EXCHANGE FOR HIS PEOPLE

GOD CONTINUES TO FORM US AS HIS PEOPLE

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<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.

God says, "I have called you by name, you are mine."

When you put your name on something,

or give a name to a pet or a child names a doll

It is a way of indicating it belongs to you.

When parents name child, they give it their own last name

which identifies that child is theirs.

Readings remind of baptism, when child is called by name.

On first Sun. after Epiphany, we celebrate baptism of Jesus

which always reminds us of our baptism, not because

John's baptism is same as Christian baptism

but because what happens in Jesus' baptism

is what makes possible what happens in our baptism.

Jesus, who is identified as God's own beloved son

identifies himself with us who need washing, so that now

God also identifies us his own children through baptism.

So our identity is not based on anything we have done,

accomplishments described in Christmas letters,

gifts we can give, or who came to our parties,

but on what God has already given us.

Parents may give child a name they hope it will grow into,

indicating what they hope it will become, like Grace or Victor.

Already from infancy, they are to think of selves that way

Epistle says you are baptized into Christ's death & resurrection,

therefore consider yourselves dead to sin.

God calls us his children. This is name we are still growing into.

Often, when I work with a text, there is one key discovery that sparks the idea for the sermon.

In this text it is that in v. 1 words in original Hebrew for created and formed are actually not past tense but present tense, a continuing action.

They could be translated “your creator, one who forms you”

This verse makes me think ahead to next Sunday when we will celebrate the right to life

and remember each person is specially made by God and already in the womb he identifies and claims us.

but as we continue to develop after birth,

God continues to develop and form us as his children.

God himself called creation into being by his word.

But he didn't stop working with it. He continues to form earth by wind and water that sculpt it,

he uses fire to form landscape making space for new life to grow, plants that survive, even thrive through fire.

God creates spiritual life in us by his word,

but he continues to form us by the work of the Spirit who washes away our sins as we live in our baptisms.

and who may also work like fire burning within us.

God assures Israel, when you pass through waters & rivers they will not overwhelm you because I am with you.

Remember crossing Red Sea and Jordan

to escape enemies and get into the promised land.

So also they will pass through fire and not be consumed.

The fire of judgment warned in the previous chapter will not destroy them, as John the Baptist preaches, because God is separating them from worthless chaff of sinful behavior that his fire consumes.

They are going in to Babylonian captivity,

but God will bring them through it, just as during it

God saved the three men in fiery furnace.

God brought Israel through these things and used them

to form them into people who trusted him

and showed his power to others.

In our lives too, we may experience floods and fires

that can leave us with nothing but most precious possession:

the life God continues to give us.

We may be over our heads in troubles and feel we are sunk

or be burned by bad choices or bad friends.

But God promises to be with us so that we are not overwhelmed or consumed.

Instead he uses these along with his mercy & forgiveness to form & shape us to be patient, trusting, humble, faithful and useful.

God is still at work, forming us and his whole church.

He carves like a sculptor, but also like a sculptor, forms by adding on to what is there.

## GOD CONTINUES TO MAKE OTHERS HIS PEOPLE

<sup>5</sup> Fear not, 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 up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar 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."

One thing God tells Israel here is that even though it will seem that coming events, like the burning of Jerusalem and being carried into captivity will be the end of them, God will do what would seem to be impossible.

He will gather again those who have been scattered and bring them back from their exile to homeland.

just as on last day, even after we die & bodies turn to dust, God will put us back together and gather us up to our eternal homeland in heaven.

God is always able to restore more than we have lost.

But there is more to it than that.

When God says he will bring back their sons and daughters they could say, we don't have any children who are far away in the north and south.

Not yet they don't!

These verses mean God will make them continue to multiply, even in places of great difficulty.

But also that God will add more to them.

The word for "offspring" in v. 5 is literally "seed."

One reason God scatters his people is because, as in Jesus' parable, God is scattering seed of his word.

When God's people are blown away by winds of adversity, and carried along by events that flood their lives, they are husks that carry in them the seed of God's word which is planted in foreign places and alien hearts.

The offspring, the sons and daughters of God that he gathers  
in the end from north, south, east and west  
are not just those who went away for a while  
but are also those who have heard God's word from them  
and been born again through faith  
and so made part of God's family with us  
so that now we too have family all over the world.

v. 7 mirrors verse 1. Those called by God's name  
includes everyone he calls

and it emphasizes that he himself does it.

He makes, forms and creates for his glory.

He gets all the credit for it.

And the verses at the center of the text tell us how.

### GOD MAKES AN EXCHANGE FOR HIS PEOPLE

<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.

<sup>4</sup> Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you,  
I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

God says we are precious in his eyes and honored.

It may not appear to us we are honored

and we may not look precious to others

but what makes us so is the way God looks at us with love.

Like an artist looking at a blank canvass or block of stone,

when God looks at us, he sees already

what we are going to be by what he himself will do.

When we look the mirror of God's perfect law,

we see our flaws and faults and failures.

but when we look at the mirror of the Gospel,

we see ourselves as precious to God.

God looks at us this way because he looks at us through Jesus

who came to be with us to take on himself our sins

and give us in their place his holiness.

Any salesman can tell you that the value of something

is what someone is willing to pay for it.

God has paid a great price for us.

v. 3 predicts how Israel will be ransomed.

They were freed from Babylonian captivity

when the Persian empire took over Babylon.

Egypt, Cush and Seba were captured by Persia as well.

That was price paid for Israel's freedom, 4 nations for 1.

This is a picture of another future ransom.

v. 3 says God, the holy one of Israel is our savior.

Jesus is God, the holy one. He saved us  
he himself is the person given in exchange for us.

He lived the perfect life to pay for we owe but have not done.

He gave his life on the cross to pay our penalty.

He rose again to give us new life.

This is why we are loved and precious,

because God sees us through Jesus.

This is why, even though what we see in our lives now

is not yet what we hope for or what God hopes for,

God continues to see us through

**GOD CONTINUES TO FORM US AS HIS PEOPLE**

by his word which calls us what we are to be

and even by floods and fire he brings us through.

And as God sculpts us he adds to us.

**GOD CONTINUES TO MAKE OTHERS HIS PEOPLE**

through the seed of the word we carry wherever we go

that God uses to give birth to more sons & daughters

because of what God himself does

**GOD MAKES AN EXCHANGE FOR HIS PEOPLE**

He sees us as precious by his grace

and so he makes us his own, ransoming us

by Jesus, our savior, the holy one of God

so that he who created us and continues to form us

can gather us from the ends of the earth into his glory.