

Rev. Dan Welch The Baptism of our Lord 1-13-19 Text- Isaiah 43:1-7

Have you ever thought about how powerful fear and worry are in our lives? In his book *Fearless*, Max Lucado says that when fear moves in, happiness moves out. When our hearts are filled with fear, he reasons, there can't be room for anything else. You can't be confident and afraid at the same time. Nobody says he has a new spring in his step now that he worries more (Lucado, *Fearless* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009], 5).

Fear grips us. Worry grabs hold of us. We find ourselves held by "**fear** knots." Those are knots in our stomach when we think about tomorrow's test at school, all the tasks that absolutely have to get done at work, that upcoming surgery that you're dreading. **Fear** knots are the things that bind our hearts when we're concerned about our children. **Fear** knots tie us up and refuse to let us go. **Fear** knots keep us lying awake in bed late at night. Fear exhausts our energy and makes us weak.

The Lord comes to **release** us from our fear. To those who are fearful and worried, he says, "Fear **not**." We can be hopeful. We can have confidence in God and His promises. Isaiah 43 tells us that by His Word, "Fear **Not**," God releases us from the worries and fears, the **fear** knots, that bind us.

Israel was bound up by **fear** knots. They were worried about how God felt about them. After all, they had disobeyed God time and again. Beginning in the wilderness with Moses, the people of Israel complained against God, doubted His goodness, and turned to idols. This continued in the days of judges and the kings.

God warned His people against their idolatry, but they refused to listen. Instead of changing and repenting, they told the prophets to stop preaching. They even threw some in prison and even killed others!

Finally, the Lord had had **enough**. At the end of Isaiah 42, right before our text, the Lord reminds Israel of what He has done: "Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not the Lord, against whom we have sinned? . . . [The Lord] poured on him the heat of his anger and the might of battle" (42:24-25).

They were also afraid of the **future**. Yes, God had promised that their exile would last only seventy years, but would He keep His promise? They had sinned against the Lord. They deserved His anger. They had earned His punishment. Would God still be faithful to His Word? Could God ever forgive them? Would God ever forgive them? Would the Lord take them home? Those knots of fear bound them like chains.

Often times we are bound by **fear** knots. Like Israel, we have disobeyed God.

We even admit that. Earlier we confessed “all our sins and iniquities with which we have offended (God) and justly deserved His temporal and eternal punishment.” It’s no wonder we tell God we deserve that, because we really do!

Take a close look at each of the Ten Commandments which expose our sins of: putting things, anything, above God, of dishonoring His holy name and the worship of Him. We also become all too aware of our sins of showing disrespect to the authorities He’s put in our lives, all the times we have wished harm on people we don’t like, thought impure thoughts, taken things that don’t belong to us, hurt people’s reputation through spreading gossip, or sinfully desired things that don’t belong to us. Yes, God’s Law, the 10 Commandments exposes every one of our sins, all the things we want to keep hidden from everyone, especially God.

It’s no wonder that we are often afraid of God and worried about what He thinks of us. Look at Martin Luther. He was so afraid of God and His wrath that He nearly fainted when he conducted his first Mass. During the prayers, he wanted to run away. But we **can’t** run away from God. We have to deal with Him.

Because we are afraid of God, our lives are tied up in **fear** knots. We don’t trust God to take care of us, so we **worry** about tomorrow. We don’t have confidence in God, so we get **filled** with anxiety. Sometimes, that worry and anxiety can come out in anger at God **and** other people. In many ways, we are tied up in worry; we are bound with **fear** knots.

One thing is for sure, we **can’t** say that our Lord Jesus was bound with **fear** knots; that’s because He didn’t have any sinful worry. He was never tied up, prevented, or paralyzed from doing what He needed to do. But as He came to John at the Jordan River, about to begin His ministry, with the prospect of Satan’s attacks, certain horrific death, and the duty of saving the world before Him, He certainly knew the terror that was ahead. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” (Heb 5:7).

“**But now . . .**” With those words, Isaiah comes to comfort us! Yes, the Lord **was** angry, but now His anger is taken away. Yes, He punished His people Israel, but He will do so no longer. Now He will save them. Now He will protect them. He tells them that they are precious and honored in His sight and He loves them. The Lord comes to release Israel from their fear knots. He says to them, “Fear **not**.”

“Fear **not!**” says the Lord. “Remember what I have done for you! I created

you. I formed you. I redeemed you. I have called you by name; you are mine” (see Is 43:1).

Those words are so powerful. “Created” and “formed” take Israel back to the very act of creation. The Lord made them into a nation. More than that, He redeemed them from Egypt, punishing Pharaoh and drowning his armies in the Red Sea. He made Israel His people. He called them by His name. He made them a nation of priests. They belonged to Him.

“Remember who I am!” says the Lord. He is not just the Creator; He is *Israel’s* Creator. He is not merely the Holy One, but the Holy One of *Israel*. He is not just the King; He is *your* King. Because the Lord is their God and Israel is His people, they can be freed from fear and have confidence.

Passing through the waters, walking through the fire—it makes no difference. *Nothing* will be able to separate us from the amazing love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8). God is with His people, and He will bring us through. The water will not overwhelm, and the fire will not burn; God will protect us. “Fear *not*,” says the Lord, “for I am with you” (v 5).

What God says to Israel, the Father said to His Son at the moment of His Baptism. With Jesus facing the road that three years later would take Him to the frightful cross, God the Father spoke from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22). When His Son would need Him, the Father would be there. “I am with you.”

Now in our Baptism, God says the same to us a hundred times over. God has created us. In Baptism, He made us His own. (God calls us by name in our Baptism.) He formed us so that we are His people. As Peter reminds us, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet 2:10). God has made us His people. God has made us a nation of priests. We belong to Him.

He has redeemed us. The Lord told Israel that He gave Egypt for them and that He gave “men in return for you” (v 4). The Lord has done much more for us. He did not give men in our place; he gave *one* Man in our place: His Son, Christ Jesus. At the cross, the Lord redeemed us. He paid for our sin. He made us His own.

At the cross, something miraculous happened. We disobeyed God. We rebelled against Him. We, like Israel, deserve His punishment. But the Lord did not punish us. He punished His Son. Our disobedience, our rebellion, our sin was laid on Him. As Isaiah would say later, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (53:5).

The Lord created us, He has redeemed us, and He has called us. In our Baptism, God reached down from heaven and placed His name on us. He called us by name, and He said that we belong to Him.

We are the Lord's because of what he has done. We do not deserve grace, but God is gracious. We are not faithful, but God is faithful. We did not choose God, but He chose us. So, the Lord is not just "the Savior;" He is "**your** Savior." He is not just the Lord God, but He is "the Lord **your** God."

Since God has done all that for us, we don't need to be afraid of Him. We are His children. Since we are His children, we don't have to be afraid of what life throws at us. We will be tested by many trials. We will be confronted by many challenges. But the Lord promises to bring us through them all. "In the world you will have tribulation," says Jesus. "But take heart; I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

Fears attack us. Worries grab hold of us. We often find ourselves tied up in **fear** knots. But the Lord comes to us. He says, "Fear **not**." "Fear **not**, for I have created you. Fear **not**, for I have redeemed you by the blood of My Son. Fear **not**, for I have (called) you by name in your Baptism. You are mine." Be confident in the Lord. Let His Word undo your **fear** knots. Remember His promise: "Fear **not**, for I am with you." Fear **not!** Amen.