

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sins for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. And Peace: peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Old Testament book of the prophet Isaiah the forty-third chapter beginning at the first verse:

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. ³ For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray Lord that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

What would you claim as your biggest fear? According to the website ask.com the most common fears for people are (in no particular order): spiders, failure, rejection, public speaking, heights, intimacy, pain, and death. I wonder how many of those you could lay claim to as a personal fear of your own... but I still wonder, what is your biggest fear?

I know that for some their biggest fear is speaking or doing anything in front of an audience. I think that this fear stems from a fear of judgement or of being inadequate. People do not want to put themselves out there just in case someone is going to judge them.

I know for some their biggest fear is death or losing a loved one... in fact this one I would have to claim as my own. Not the fear of death,

but the fact that I do not want to lose my family. And if I were to lose my family I do not know what I would do... and I worry that that is a condition that would definitely test my faith.

I also know that for some people the thought of pain or of discomfort is enough to cause them fear. Yes, just the thought not even the actual experiencing of it.

But what about you, what is your biggest fear? Do you have it now? Is it locked into your mind... well dear friend, as God would say and does say to us in our text today, “***FEAR NOT!***”

And now, I will be the first to admit that it is a very difficult thing to do... to fear not. We have so much going on around us in this day and age that it seems like fear is about the only option that we have. I mean turn on the news and it is enough to cause most people to hide in a bunker for fear of what is coming. Read a newspaper and you are afraid of the violence and mayhem that is going on around you. And

yet, in our text for today, God reminds us that we do not need to fear.

God is speaking to the nation of Israel, to His people, and to us and He tells us to fear not. We do not need to fear, yes even though we walk through the waters... as He led His people out of Egypt... as He led His people across the River Jordan; and when we walk through the fire He promises that we will not be burned and the flame will not scorch us.

Now, no, this is not an opportunity to go out and try to walk through a burning fire to test God; rather, this is a chance to trust in God and take Him at His word. God promises us that regardless of what we are going through, He is there with us. And in this text, in these loving and gracious words, we can see so much of the Bible playing out: Moses leading the people through the Red Sea, Joshua leading the people through the Jordan, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

And we can see our own life too. We can see our life as we pass through the waters of

baptism. God blessing us and bringing us into His family... and removing our sin and our guilt from us. Just as Paul tells us about Moses and those who passed through the Red Sea, “Moreover brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” Just as the Israelites left Egypt, which we so often symbolize as a place of sin and of that satan Pharaoh, so we too were taken from the place of sin, our lives, and we passed through the waters of baptism and into God’s family... into God’s land.

We can also see this as we pass over the river... so often crossing over the river Jordan and entering into the Promised Land is portrayed as us, God’s chosen people, crossing over from death to life. And while the Israelites did indeed cross the Jordan river to enter into Israel, we cross over from death to life and enter into our Promised Land of heaven. Just as Augustine preached:

Regard yourselves as delivered out of Egypt from a harsh servitude, where iniquity rules over you; and as having passed through the Red Sea by baptism, in which you received the seal of Christ's bloody cross. Prune yourselves therefore of past sins, those enemies of yours which pursued you from the rear. For as the Egyptians perished in the very waters traversed by the people of God, so your sins were blotted out in the waters in which you were baptized.

Seek now the heavenly kingdom, the land of promise to which you have been called, and be vigilant in resisting temptations throughout this earthly life, which is nothing else than a desert wherein you are sojourners. By partaking of the holy Altar, you receive your manna along with the drink that flows from the rock. All this the Apostle Paul has in mind and inculcates in his preaching when he says, “I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea. And all in Moses were baptized, in the cloud, and in the sea. And did all eat the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; and they drank of the

spiritual rock that followed them; and the rock was Christ.

Friends, we can definitely see ourselves in this text, because this text was meant for us... it is meant for God's faithful children. It is meant for those who trust and believe in what God has said... it is meant for the believers in His Son. His Son Jesus Christ, who came into this world to live and die for us. His Son who came into this world to suffer and hang on a cross for us. His Son who came into this world to rise again from the dead for us.

Jesus, too, passed through all of these things. Jesus was baptized and He passed through the waters of the Red Sea. He not only led Moses and the Israelites, as Paul tells us, but He also was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And Jesus passed over the Jordan, once to come down from heaven for us and again to return to His home in heaven. And Jesus has passed through the fire for us... He suffered hell itself as He hung on the cross. Jesus has experienced all of this, and He has done it for us. He did it so that we would receive all the benefits from

it. He did it to "fulfill all righteousness." He did it to guarantee that you and I have a place in heaven. Jesus lived, suffered, died, and rose again for you... and because of this we no longer have to fear.

We do not need to fear the death and destruction happening around us for God is keeping us safe as He deems best. We do not need to fear that people will judge us... because they first judged Him. We do not need to fear the world for Christ has overcome the world. We have nothing to fear... but we still do.

Though God tells us not to fear, we do. We fear that bad things could happen to us. We fear that we could lose a loved one. We fear that our lives could be lost. We fear that we could lose our jobs, our homes, our families. We fear that maybe people won't like what we have to say. We fear that we will be judged for living a certain way, or dressing a certain way, or really for any reason. We fear... but we do not need to fear.

Every fear that we have is driven by one thing... sin. Our fear is fueled by sin. Just as Saint John tells us, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." And it is true... up to this point in our lives we have not been made perfect in love. We still sin and thus we still fear. We are not perfect... yet, Jesus Christ was perfect for you. Jesus lived a perfect life, for you. So that while you are not perfect just yet... God still sees us that way. God sees us as perfect for the sake of His Son... and for that we can love God. As John continues, "We love Him because He first loved us."

We love our God because He first loved us. Though our first parents sinned, God had a plan. Though Israel continually disobeyed God, God had a plan. Though we are not perfect children, God has a plan. We are able to love God, because He first loved us and He gave His Son up for us. When we allow that to be the focus of our lives... well then we have nothing to fear.

Dear friends in Christ, yes life can be scary. It can have rough places that push us to the edge of fear... but when we lean on Jesus for all that we need; when we trust the words of our God that He has spoken to us today; when we focus on God and God alone we have nothing to fear. Just as God told His children through Isaiah, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name, you are Mine." Friends, we have nothing to fear: God has redeemed us through the precious life and death of His Son, God has called us by name when He baptized each of us into His family, and now that we are faithful children of God and believers in Jesus Christ, we are God's own. No matter what may come up in our lives, God is with us and He will never leave us. Whether we cross through the Red Sea, whether we come up against the Jordan River, whether we end up walking through the fire... God will let nothing happen to us. God will be with us and God will protect us... because He promises to.

Thank God, that He has made promises to me. Thank God that He is faithful to all of His promises. And thank God that one day I will get

to stand before His throne having passed
through the Red Sea, having gone over the
Jordan, having endured the fire... and I be able
to stand in His presence with no more fear
inside of me.

Thanks be to God. Amen.