

Bible Tuesday for the Baptism of Our Lord, 2019

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob,

he who formed you, O Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine.

² 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.

³ For I am the Lord your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.

I give Egypt as your ransom,

Ethiopia* and Seba in exchange for you.

⁴ Because you are precious in my sight,

and honoured, and I love you,

I give people in return for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

⁵ Do not fear, for I am with you;

I will bring your offspring from the east,

and from the west I will gather you;

⁶ I will say to the north, 'Give them up',

and to the south, 'Do not withhold;

bring my sons from far away

and my daughters from the end of the earth—

⁷ everyone who is called by my name,

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made.'

This prophecy is words of grace from God to Judah while they are preparing to leave Babylonia and return to Canaan, the promised land. God assures the southern kingdom, Judah, that He will bring them safely from exile back home. Through rivers and streams, across the Jordan River, through wilderness and wildfires, God will bring them home.

How curious that the prophet says that God swops other peoples for the Israelites. Some Israelites, including the prophet Jeremiah, fled Canaan in all directions, including to Egypt and Ethiopia, as Babylonia was marching against Judah. In this prophecy, God trades Egyptians and Ethiopians for those Israelite diaspora.

Israel believed that, since they were God's chosen people, they would be kept safe from harm and defeat by other pagan countries. When the northern kingdom fell to Assyria and the southern kingdom believed it was because they did not come to Jerusalem to worship. But,

then the southern kingdom fell to Babylonia! The prophets, including Isaiah, declared that Judah had betrayed God and that they fell because God was using Babylonia to punish them. Once Judah fell to Babylonia, they believed that God had abandoned them. This prophecy from Third Isaiah addresses those fears. No! God has not abandoned them! Rather, God is actively redeeming Judah and bringing all her people home! Not because they have been punished enough or have learned their lessons, but because God values and loves them.

Psalm 29

A Psalm of David.

- ¹ Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,^{*}
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
- ² Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
worship the Lord in holy splendour.

- ³ The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord, over mighty waters.
- ⁴ The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

- ⁵ The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;
the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

- ⁷ The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.
- ⁸ The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;
the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

- ⁹ The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,^{*}
and strips the forest bare;
and in his temple all say, 'Glory!'

- ¹⁰ The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;
the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.
- ¹¹ May the Lord give strength to his people!
May the Lord bless his people with peace!

We had this psalm a couple months back and I treated it thoroughly then. Here is a summary of that writing.

This psalm is a reworking and blending of ancient non-Israelite mythical writing and Israelite coronation themes. Many ancient Middle Eastern religions viewed water (storms, large bodies of water) as an uncontrolled god-like force. This psalm uses those water images to describe

God/Yahweh and illustrate God's power. God is over or in control of the waters. God is in control of the gale force winds that accompany storms. God's voice is the source of lightening and wildfires.

The final verses speak of God being the top God eternally over natural and human forces. Then, the psalmist asks for God to condescend to Israel to grant them both power and peace. In this case, "peace" is the English translation of "Shalom" or complete satiation and contentment, bliss and trust, granted by God.

Acts 8:14-17

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit ¹⁶(for as yet the Spirit had not come ^{*} upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). ¹⁷Then Peter and John ^{*} laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

The Jews who lived in Samaria were viewed as "less than" by the Jews who lived in Judah and Galilee. The Samaritans were Jews who were left behind by Assyria and Babylonia when they conquered the northern and southern kingdoms. Assyria and Babylonia took the educated and wealthy Jews to their own countries for various reasons. The Jewish tradesmen, farmers, and fishermen were left behind to work the land and pay tribute to their conquerors. Those folks were left to their own devices to practice Judaism, since the priests and Levites were taken captive. They intermarried with their pagan neighbors and worshiped God where they were, no longer making pilgrimages to the Temple in Jerusalem. They usurped their neighbor's homes and possessions when their neighbors were taken captive. One can only imagine the conflicts that arose when those captives returned home. The Samaritans became a hated, loathed people to the Jews.

How shocked the apostles and disciples were when they heard that Samaritans received the gospel of Jesus! I can only imagine the discussion that they must have had when trying to decide whether or not they should send delegates to those Samaritans, and if so, who. As I have stated before, the Holy Spirit was sent by God to only certain, called individuals in the Hebrew Scriptures. The story of Pentecost is unprecedented in the number of folks who receive the Holy Spirit, and at one time, and without anyone laying hands on or blowing on anyone! Here Peter and John laid hands on these heretofore rejected Samaritans and the HOLY SPIRIT came upon even them!

Luke 3:15-22

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ^{*} ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with ^{*} the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the ruler, * who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; * with you I am well pleased.*

This passage, which begins with John's ministry and ends with Jesus baptism, is written by Luke as a transition between the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus. Unlike the other three gospels, Luke does not mention Salome's dance or John's beheading well into Jesus' ministry. Instead, Luke has John pass the baton to Jesus in this passage.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have John the Baptist presenting Jesus in this fashion, with "his winnowing fork in his hand" to gather grain and burn chaff. I can think of many ways in which Jesus "gathers grain" but I cannot think of ways in which Jesus burns chaff. Jesus certainly warns of "unquenchable fire" and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in Gehenna, and he throws the moneychangers out of the Temple, but he never overthrows or deposes any of the power mongering religious leaders of his day, or even any of the Herods. Jesus certainly warns people about them, but he leaves them to their own devices and eventual downfalls, even though it means that they execute Jesus. I wonder if "gathering grain" and "burning with unquenchable fire" are wishful thinking on John's part. When Jesus does not demonstrate the kind of messianic ministry that John expects, John sends some of his disciples to Jesus asking, "Are you the one or shall we look for another?" Jesus answers, ""Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them." (Luke 7:22)

The second part of this passage is Jesus actual baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. Jesus does not need to be baptized for the repentance of sins, like all the other Israelites. Yet, he comes to John to be baptized. Why?

Baptism, in the Jewish tradition, is an act of purification and an outward sign of change. I have written before of the Jewish tradition of the mikvah, the ritual bath in "moving" or "living" water (Water that flows through the bathing area, whether in the Jordan River, where water is flowing past all the time, or in a bathtub of sorts where the faucet is always on and the drain plug is always open.). Jewish ritual bathing in the mikvah was done for two reasons: purification, and repentance or life direction change. The people who entered the Jordan River with John the Baptist were doing so to ritually cleanse themselves in preparation for the messiah, and to washing away their old way of sin and be clean for a new way of life. While Jesus did not need to wash off an old way of sin, he was changing his life's direction from being the eldest son of a deceased carpenter, the primary breadwinner of his family, to being that of the messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the World. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' baptism is the point at which Jesus changing his life's direction from common firstborn son in a Jewish family to only born Son of God. God speaks to Jesus to emphasize this very point. God quotes

the psalms when he says, "You are my son..." The rest of the verse is, "Today I have begotten you." The second part of the psalm verse is left dangling and instead God says, "the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." No one else ever in the Bible is ever given the title of being well pleasing to God. Not even Abraham or Moses or Elijah. Jesus hasn't even done anything yet, no miracles, no healings, no raisings from the dead, but God is well pleased with him.

Thank you, Jesus that you allow us to ride on your coattails! Our most selfless efforts to please God reek of pride and self-focus. Thank you that through you, God calls us beloved too.