

Fear Knot and Fear Nots

Baptism of our Lord – 01/12/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 43:1-7 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 1 [Yahweh says to the people of Jacob/Israel,] **“...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I called you by your name, you belong to Me.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ I'm sure that, at one time or another; perhaps for some of us it has been many times, that we have all experienced extreme fear or worry to the point that it has seriously affected our ability to think, speak or function as we'd like, right? These two emotions – fear and worry, in fact work together as two ends of a very dangerous; even crippling rope.
 - ➔ The famous Christian author, Max Lucado, In his book *Fearless*, says that when fear moves in, happiness moves out. When our hearts are filled with fear, he reasons, there is no room for anything else. In other words, 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).
- ⊗ Yes, fear grabs us and worry takes hold of us. And when that happens, we find that we are tied up as captives by what are often called “fear knots.”
 - ➔ Think, for example, of those knots in your stomach when you think about tomorrow's surgery or the next day's exam at school or the court date that is coming up or the difficult conversation you know you must have to work out a conflict. Fear knots are those concerns that bind our hearts when we're worried about our children; those things that tie us up and refuse to let us go; the fear that exhausts our energy and makes us weak.
- ⊗ Well, my fellow believers in Christ, Isaiah tells us today that our God comes to us in His undeserved love to release us from our fear. To those who are filled with fear and tied up by worry, He says, both in verses one and five of our Old Testament Reading, “Fear not.” That means we can be hopeful. We can have confidence in God because He promises us here when He tells us, “Fear not,” that He has come to release us from the worries and fears; from the “fear knots,” that seek to tie us up and bind us in our sin.

I. Like Israel, We are bond by “Fear Knots”

- ⊗ At the time of our Old Testament Reading in Isaiah 43, the people of Jacob or Israel were all 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, they had the gall to complain against God; they doubted His power and goodness and turned to idols. This continued for years; into and through the days of judges and the kings.
 - ➔ But it's not like God had been silent or inactive. He warned His people against their idolatry, yet they refused to listen. Instead of changing and repenting, they actually told the prophets to stop preaching; even throwing some of them into prison and killing others.
- ⊗ Finally, Yahweh had enough. At the end of chapter 42, immediately before our text, Isaiah reminds Israel who it was that put them back into the sorry state of slavery that they were currently in. He asked, “Who gave up Jacob to the looter, and Israel to the plunderers? Was it not Yahweh, against whom we have sinned? ... He poured on [Israel] the heat of His anger and the might of battle” (42:24–25). It's easy to see why they were so afraid. I mean, it's never good to have God's anger burning against you, right?
 - ➔ And so, they were afraid of their future as well. Sure, God had promised that their exile would last only seventy years, but would He keep His promise? After all, they had sinned

against Yahweh. They certainly deserved His anger. They had absolutely earned His punishment. Would He; could He still be faithful to His Word? Could God still forgive them? Would He take them back as His people; back to their home? These knots of fear had them all tied up.

✘ You and I understand, don't we? because we too are often bound by fear knots. Like Israel, we've disobeyed God. We openly confessed at the beginning of worship today, "all [our] sins and iniquities with which [we] have...offended" God so that we "justly deserved [His] temporal and eternal punishment" (LSB, pg. 184).

→ Yes, as "poor, miserable sinners" we have actually rebelled against God. In Psalm 2:2-3, King David writes, "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'" So, who are those kings? Who are those rulers who set themselves against Yahweh?

→ Ultimately folks, it's you and me! We still want to be our own "kings"; the ones who "rule" over our own lives. And so we actively rebel against God and His 4th Commandment, for example, when we knowingly complain about our employer whom God has put in authority over us or break the speed limit or refuse to do the homework that our teachers assign to us or disrespect the leaders God has placed over us in government or other places. We could do the same thing with every one of the 10 Commandments couldn't we? Like the way that we put our own desires first, before God and His Word (1st & 3rd Commands) or continue to swear and misuse His name (2nd Command.) or lie to and twist the truth with others through gossip and other hurtful talk (8th Command.). Do I need to go on?

✘ No wonder we tell God that we justly deserve His temporal and eternal punishment. We do!

→ It's no wonder that we often are afraid of God; 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 consecrating Christ's body and blood for the first time. He wanted to run away from God. Many people still think that's the answer, when they leave the Church; thinking there's no way God can actually love and forgive me – not with all of my sin. But friends, that is absolutely not the case. Letting fear and worry and guilt tie you up and win in keeping you away from God? No, we must deal with God, according to His own words and terms, not according to the world or the devil or our own fear and worry.

→ Sometimes that worry and anxiety even tears us down in our faith; causing us to doubt the God that we once trusted so firmly; expressing our fear in anger at God and other people. These are fear knots that bind us up as well.

✘ But we cannot say that our Lord Jesus was bound with fear knots, can we? Though He faced temptation and stress and trouble more than any of us can ever know, He was never tied up; never prevented, or paralyzed from doing what He needed to do. Yet, as He came to John at the Jordan River; about to begin His earthly ministry; facing the prospect of Satan's attacks and the horrors of crucifixion because of His duty to save the entire world, Jesus certainly knew the terrors of this world. Hebrews 5:7 tells us that "Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears."

II. Yahweh says, "Fear not..."

✘ Isaiah takes all of this legitimate fear and worry into account and starts out our text today saying, "But now ...". He comes to God's people to comfort us! Yes, Yahweh 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 even tells them in verse four that they are "precious" and "honored" in His sight. He says, "I love you."

- This is Yahweh, the just and righteous God over all, coming to release His people from their/our fear knots. So how does He begin? He says, “Fear not.” “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”; taking Israel (and you and me) all the way back to the very beginning of time. God is the one who made them into a nation. More than that, He redeemed them from Egypt; punishing Pharaoh and drowning him in the Red Sea. He made Israel His holy and chosen people. He placed His name upon them. They belonged to Him that day and forevermore.
 - This is Yahweh calling the people out, “Remember who I am!” “I am not just the Creator; I am your Creator. I am not merely the Holy One, but the Holy One of Israel; of you. I am not just the King; I am your King!” Because Yahweh is their God and Israel is His people, they can live from that day forward in confidence; no longer bound; no longer controlled by fear.
 - ✘ “Passing through the waters” or “walking through the fire” in verse two together forms a picture of every, and any, danger that we can face in this world. But it makes no difference, because God promises that He is with His people; He will bring them through. The water cannot overwhelm nor can the fire burn them because Yahweh promises in verse five, “Fear not, for I am with you.”
 - ✘ And friends, what God says to Israel; what the Father said to His Son, Jesus at the moment of His Baptism, when He was facing the road that would take Him to His suffering on the cross, “You are My beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22) – this is the truth that He speaks clearly to you and to me now in our Baptism.
 - In fact, God declares His love and presence with us a hundred times over. He created us. He gave us life. In Baptism, He made us His own; regenerating us individually in the glory of His Son, and molding us all together into one body of believers as His bride – His Church. As Peter so aptly tells us, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Pet. 2:10). Yes, God has made us a nation of priests; His ambassadors to this world. We belong to Him; to serve Him; to declare Him; to be loved by Him.
 - ✘ In verse four, Yahweh told Israel that He gave Egypt for them and that He gave “men in return for you.” In fact, He has done so much more for us. He gave the one and only Man in our place that could save us “poor miserable sinners”; His Son, Jesus. Allowing Him to be nailed to the cross, Jesus paid for our sin; bought us back from death and hell, and made us His own forever.
 - ✘ It’s there at the cross that something truly miraculous happened. Even though we disobeyed and rebelled against God; even though we deserved His full wrath and punishment right along with Israel, Yahweh did not punish us! Instead He punished His perfect Son. All of our disobedience; all of our rebellion; all of our sin was laid on Him. As Isaiah said later, “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).
 - And now, in our Baptism, God has reached down from heaven and placed His name; the name of Jesus upon us. You and I are now “little Christs”. Our name is “Christian” because we belong forever to Christ, our Savior!
 - ✘ But understand this clearly: we are His only because of what He has done. We don’t deserve grace, yet God is gracious. We are not faithful, but God remains faithful to us. We did not choose God. He’s the one who chose us! Therefore, Yahweh is not just “the Savior;” He is “your Savior.” He is not just the Lord God, but He is “the Lord your God.”
 - And since God has done all that for us, you and I don’t need to be afraid of Him. We are His beloved children. And since we are His children, we do not need to fear whatever life might

throw our way. Make no mistake, we will be tested by many trials and confronted perhaps by more challenges because we belong to Christ. But God has promised to bring us through all of them. "In the world you will have tribulation," says Jesus in John 16:33. "But take heart; I have overcome the world."

✘ So, whenever the fears; whenever the worries of this life try to tie you up in fear knots, remember that your God comes to you in His Son, Jesus and says, "Fear not, for I have created you. Fear not, for I have redeemed you by the blood I shed on the cross. Fear not, for I marked you and claimed you by My name in your Baptism. You are mine."

➔ So be confident, dear Christian, in your Savior. Let His Word undo your fear knots so that you can live in His promise: "Fear not, for I am with you" (v.5). Amen.