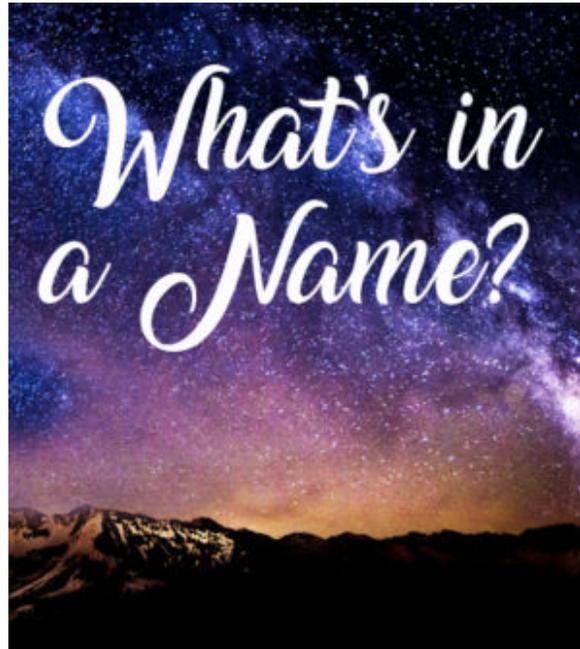


“Named and Claimed”

Isaiah 43:1-7

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“What’s in a name?” I would guess that most of us in this room have had an experience of someone getting our name wrong... our last name, our first name... misspelled on a Starbucks cup, mispronounced by a telemarketer (“Is this Mrs. De Jorge?”), totally mistaken by someone who thought they knew our name, but did not. There was an older gentlemen in our last congregation named Homer who was absolutely convinced that my husband, Tim’s, name was Ken. “Oh, hi Ken!” he’d say... and no matter how many times Tim would correct him (“It’s TIM – T-I-M, Tim!” in his loudest nursing home chaplain voice), Homer heard Ken (maybe it was a Yanni/Laurel thing!).

The misspeaking of our names is only a very slight offense. On the other side of things, the correct speaking and knowing of our names can bless us in surprising ways. When someone remembers your name that you weren’t expecting to remember your name... I know I’ve told this story before, but my first birthday card from my mother-in-law (after I got married to Tim)

included all of my names: Heidi Sue Petersen (maiden name) De Vries (first married name) De Jonge. When someone uses your name and speaks it with love, you feel known. I feel known.

Isaiah prophesies in chapter 43 – “This is what the Lord says—he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you *by name*; you are mine.” Now, there is a national/communal truth to this verse...



God formed the nation of Israel – and created them from out of Egypt... he gave them a new identity and shaped them to be the people he designed them to be for the life of the blessing of the world.

But before they were a nation of thousands, they were a family of a couple dozen... and the Father’s name was Jacob... and the mothers were Rachel and Leah and their maidservants. And the father and mother of Jacob were Isaac and Rebekah... and his parents’ names were Abraham and Sarah.



God formed and created and named a whole nation AND this came also by way of God’s forming and creating and calling and naming individual people.

Isaiah 43 has a personal tone to it. Don't be afraid... I've redeemed and summoned you. You're mine... I have created you and formed you! This verse resonates with Psalm 139: You created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

And God doesn't just know you intimately... God doesn't just *know* your name... God *summons you* by name and you belong to him.

[AT THIS POINT, I INVITED THE CONGREGATION (all of them, even those who were just there that day) TO WRITE THEIR NAMES ON THE FLOOR OF THE SANCTUARY WHILE WE SANG *HE KNOWS MY NAME*. ALONG WITH THEIR NAMES, THEY WROTE, "CHILD OF GOD"]

I read a book a couple of weeks ago that I am thinking about turning into a summer preaching series.. we'll see. The title is, "Everything Happens for A Reason And Other Lies I've Loved."



It was written by Kate Bowler, a historian from Duke Divinity School who is married, with a young son, and she has been diagnosed in her 30s with stage 4 cancer and likely does not have long to live. The title of her book is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to things we say to each other as Christians that we think are biblical or comforting or true but are actually none of those things.

One lie that we like to believe – love to believe – as Christians is that when we are in Christ, nothing bad will ever happen to us.... That we have nothing to be afraid of because God is on our side and he will make sure nothing bad happens to us. The opposite is true... Not only does God's presence not keep bad things from happening to us, but when we are in Christ, we

can actually expect that trials and tribulations will come. Isaiah 43 has a very important little word in it, and the word is “When.” It doesn’t say, “*If* you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and *if* you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. *If* you walk through the fire...” No, it says, “WHEN these things happen to you, I will be with you.” John Calvin said, “The Lord has not redeemed you so that you might enjoy pleasures and luxuries... but so that you should be prepared for enduring all kinds of evils.”¹

The thing that you are most afraid of could happen to you... for some of you, the thing that you are most afraid of is happening to you right now. When this happens, God is with you. As a follower of Jesus, are you exempt from fires? No... my friend Thyra’s house burned down in a fire a couple of years ago. As a follower of Jesus, do you magically float on water? No, a Cadet camper at my sister’s church, named Nay, went under the water at a campout and nearly drowned a couple of weeks ago... had to be helicoptered to a hospital.

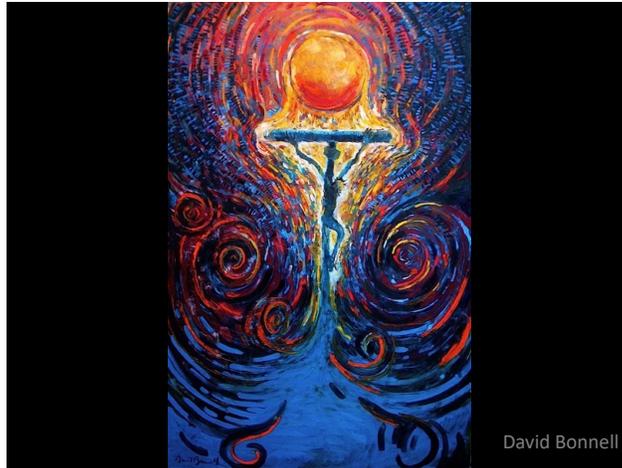
And, what’s more, some followers of Jesus do burn in fires and do drown in waters... but even then... Does God ever really leave them? Does death separate them from the love of God? No. Even then they were created, formed, redeemed, summoned, precious, loved, and honoured.

So precious and honoured are God’s children that the Lord says that he will give other nations for their ransom and other peoples in exchange for them. (Read 3b-4)

Now, how do we interpret this? The Old Testament *does* contain stories of God wiping out other nations in favour of his chosen people, but we cannot interpret these verses well without the turning the page to the New Testament. As the story of salvation progresses, we see that God’s ransoming action ultimately gets worked out “in him who knew no sin becoming sin for our sakes” (2 Cor. 5:21). It gets worked out in him who gave ‘his life as a ransom for many’ (Matt. 20:29).”² God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit absorbed all the pain and sin and brokenness of this world so that the cycle of pain and violence would be stopped...

¹ As quoted by John Oswalt, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Isaiah 40-66*, p. 138.

² *Ibid.*, p. 140.



On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, and after he had given thanks, said, “This is my body, given for you – do this in remembrance of me.”

In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

*Since you are precious and honored in his sight,
and because he loves you,
He gave himself in exchange for you,
his very self in exchange for your life.*

For whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes again. And when he comes again, it will be the ending of the great regathering.



*⁵Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.
⁶I will say to the north, 'Give them up!'
and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'
Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth—
⁷everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."*

The regathering refers, perhaps, to multiple regatherings... the regathering of the Jews scattered in exile... and the regathering of the Jewish people in this last century... but ultimately, through Christ, the gathering in of all whom God calls, whom God created for his glory, whom God formed and made.... A gathering of those who are now far off... far from a flourishing life... far from a community of believers... far from you... perhaps far from life and already on the other side of death... (I do not say far from God, because I believe God is with them, even if they are not with us...) God's got a great regathering in the works...

In a couple of moments, I am going to invite you to come forward for communion ... And as you're waiting to come forward, or even as you're coming forward, or going back to your seat, I'd like you to write another name, perhaps next to your name... or perhaps in a different space... of someone that you long to be gathered... gathered into the community of believers... gathered back to you... gathered into the work of the kingdom, gathered into a reciprocal relationship with Jesus... Or someone who has died that you long to see gathered back to life at the resurrection... God knows their names, too...