

1/13/2019

“Be Led and Affirmed by God”

Scripture: Isaiah 43:1; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Baptism of the Lord

Theme: We, like John the Baptist, Jesus the Christ and others, can be led and affirmed by God’s Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 43:1 (NRSV)

*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.***

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 (NRSV)

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John 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. His 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.”

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and 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.”***

As we again enter and move into a new year, we may have hopes and aspirations for a new beginning, a different direction, with new resolutions and goals. As we considered last week, I want to further explore where and how God is leading us.

This week, I want to emphasize that we can be led and affirmed by God. You can make a new beginning. You can turn back to God. You can get or keep your life headed in the right direction. Here’s how . . .

† **God has redeemed us and called us by name. (Isaiah 43:1)**

Like the people of Israel, the descendants of Jacob, we often go astray from the word and will of God. At times we may even find ourselves wondering if God is still with us or loves us. We may question if there is any hope for us or for others we love.

Yet, God has repeatedly, as demonstrated with Jacob and his descendants, provided a

way back. God loves each and every one of us on this planet. And as Isaiah the prophet proclaimed the word of God to the people of Israel long ago, ***“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”***

We don't have to worry or be afraid. God has already redeemed us. He has paid the ultimate price in Jesus Christ. He knows who we are and whose we are. God calls us by name. We are God's children and God's people.

I encourage you to claim God's promise and protection.

† **God sends the Holy Spirit upon us to lead, affirm, and empower us.**

And in our gospel reading from Luke this morning, we recall the baptism of Jesus. And so, the Sunday after the Epiphany is celebrated as Baptism of the Lord. It acknowledges Jesus' identification with humanity and the humanity within himself. Although he is without sin himself, he begins to fulfill all that is needed for humankind to be righteous (right with God) by being baptized. He leads by example.

And as he does so, notice again what happens. Luke records . . .

*Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and 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.”***

Already led by the Holy Spirit to John for baptism, the Holy Spirit now descends upon him in the form of a dove, known to the people of Israel as a sign of peace.

And, God's voice came from heaven declaring and reminding Jesus that he is God's Son, the beloved.

Jesus would then be led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. But first, he is assured by God that he is a beloved child of God.

Friends, we, too, are beloved children of God. But, we must acknowledge that love. We must accept God's grace. We must follow the Spirit's leading and way if we want God to truly be well pleased with us.

If you are willing to do that, God's Spirit will descend upon you. God will lead you even further still. Now, that doesn't mean that life will always be easy. What it does mean is that God will affirm you. God will give you the strength and power you need to endure

and persevere; to follow through on that which you resolve to do in God's will, to reach your goals. God will give you the joy and peace of abundance and victory in Christ!

Today is a day when Christians often remember their baptism and are thankful for God's loving grace and identification as a true and blessed child of God.

You may have heard me share before that although I came to believe in Jesus as the Christ and accepted him as my personal Savior when I was only nine years old, I didn't become what I would call an "intentional" disciple, until I was sixteen. And although I studied his teachings and tried to follow his way, I wasn't formally baptized with water, until I was twenty five years old. It was only by the Holy Spirit's continued leading and direction that I came to believe and feel that it was time, before I was to follow God's call to a greater mission and ministry.

I wasn't sure then just what that would be. In fact, it took a different direction and has done so more than once. And, I'm not necessarily saying that you will be called or led to ordained ministry; but maybe you will.

So, let me just say to you here and now: it doesn't matter where you've been or what you have or haven't done. God loves you. It doesn't matter whether you have believed in Jesus already or have just come to believe right now. It doesn't matter who you are, how old or young you are, how much money or possessions you have, how much secular education or bible knowledge you have.

What matters is that you want to accept God's love. You want to learn more of and from Jesus. You want to follow his way. You want to share God's love with others. You want to make this world a better place for all.

If you want and do those things, you will come to know the abundant and everlasting life Jesus came to give you!

All you have to do is know that God has redeemed you and hear God calling you by name.

All you have to do is invite Jesus into your heart and life, and you will never be the same. God will lead you to new places. God will lift you to new heights.

So where and how is God leading you by the Spirit this year?

If you have been baptized into Christ, at whatever age or in whatever way, I invite you to affirm that decision and baptism today. And if you haven't yet received God's love in Jesus Christ, I invite you to do so today. Simply pray: "Dear Jesus, forgive my sins and come into my heart. I receive you as my Savior and Lord." If you have prayer this prayer, please give me a call or send me a text or email letting me know. We can connect in helping you follow Jesus and his way.

And may God richly bless you in many more ways today and in the week ahead!

Questions for Reflection:

How have you experienced God calling you?"

Do you know and realize that you are loved by God?

Have you been baptized in Christ? Do you feel God's Holy Spirit leading you to live in ways that please God? What are they?