

Bible reading: [Isaiah 43 verses 1 – 7](#)

(1) I don't know if it was the case when you went to school but when our children started school, we had to put their name on everything.

Ties and shirts and blouses and blazers and plimsoles and bags and shorts etc. etc. everything had their name on it.

This was important because all the school ties, shirts, blouses and blazers etc. looked exactly the same.

In a school where there are hundreds of other children, things can very easily get lost or left behind in the changing room. And so if you lost your jumper because you took it off in the playground on a warm, sunny day, all you had to do was go to reception and explain what it was you had lost and the receptionist would go to the lost items cupboard (most schools have one of these) and she would be able to find your jumper amongst all the other jumpers because it had your name on it, and it would be returned to you.

Having your name on it says it belongs to you.

(2) This got me thinking about the film Toy Story. Many of you will know the story which is all about a boy called Andy and his toys.

And one of the important parts of the film is when we see the feet of the toys. Andy writes his name on the feet of his favourite toys to make sure they don't get lost and so that everyone knows that they belong to him. And the toys know they are loved by Andy and are special to him because they can see his name on their feet.

You will see what I mean as we watch this clip.

(3) Video clip <https://youtu.be/lrIO-wv-AS4>

So, whenever the toys felt worthless and of no value, all they had to do was look at their feet.

(4) This morning as we begin a new year we are thinking of Isaiah Chapter 43 where God says, ***'I have called you by name, you belong to me.'***

As a follower of Jesus, you belong to God.

He made you, he loves you, and he knows your name and my name.

Isn't it so encouraging that God says he has called you by name and that you belong to him?

But when we read these words in Isaiah Chapter 43, we should ask ourselves what is the context? What is the situation and why is this being said?

(5) To answer that we have to look back to the previous chapter where we find God's people in a truly dire situation.

If we think we're going through hard times then they had it far worse.

They were supposed to be God's people – hadn't he called their ancestor Abraham and promised that he would be great and his descendants would fill the land and would be the means that God would use to bless the whole world.

They were to be God's special people – but when Isaiah writes to them they were in exile, they had suffered a crushing military defeat and been shipped off to what is now Iran and Iraq.

They were a laughing stock to their enemies – God's chosen people – you must be kidding.

And what's more, they couldn't get away from the fact that it was basically all their own fault.

You see, running alongside the privilege of being called God's people is the responsibility of living up to that calling.

They were to be faithful to God and not go running after idols and yet that is exactly what they had done.

The end of Chapter 42 reminds us of that,

**(6) 24 Who handed Jacob over to become loot,
and Israel to the plunderers?**

Was it not the Lord,

against whom we have sinned?

For they would not follow his ways;

they did not obey his law.

It would be pretty disastrous if it was to end there – but thankfully it doesn't.

(7) Look again at how Chapter 43 begins,

But now, 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.

These are words of hope to a crushed people. This is a call to a people in exile to come home again – to rebuild and start over again.

Despite all that had happened and all that they had done that they shouldn't have done – they still belonged to God.

(8) God says,

I have created you.

I have formed you.

I have redeemed you

I have called you by name

You belong to me.

God **created us**, he made us. And as our creator he has an affection and a care for those he has made – even if these made things have minds of their own and go and do their own thing.

But not only has he created us, he has also **formed us** into his special people. In Isaiah's time it was obvious who God's special people were. Isaiah calls them Israel and Abraham's descendants.

But what about us? Abraham isn't our ancestor. We didn't receive the promises, so can we be included too?

And the answer is yes, all because of the next line - because he has **redeemed us**.

That word 'redeemed' means to buy back or retrieve something that's been lost. And that's what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross so that outsiders and people who are far away from God can be brought close to God and welcomed into his family.

He has **called us by name**, and we are his.

In another place in Isaiah, God says he has written your name on the palm of his hands.

We, with all our individual quirks and failings are known to God and loved by God and belong to him.

That will never change.

None of us knows what 2022 will bring, but we can be pretty sure there will be many challenges along the way.

It will help us to remember, that just as God said to his people long ago, he also says to us,

I have created you.

I have formed you.

I have redeemed you

I have called you by name

You belong to me.

Song Father God, I wonder

Song How good is the God we adore