

Sermon May 27th (Isaiah 43:1-13)

'Do not be afraid'

The reading is taken from Isaiah 43 verses 1 -13

**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
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze, 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour, I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush[a] and Seba in your stead. 4 Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. 5 Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. 6 I 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—7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” 8 Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. 9 All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of their gods foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, “It is true. 10 “You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will, there be one after me. 11 I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no saviour. 12 I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “that I am God. 13 Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”**

I think we all have our fears, for me one of my fears is heights and being unstable. The idea of being at height is okay with me as long as I feel safe and stable. When training for going away to Peru as part of BMS action teams, we all had to go to a Christian outdoor centre for a few days. One of the tasks we had to do was build a tower out of crates which would build trust with your team. The task was simple you had to build the tallest tower of crates in your team one team member would be standing on the crates while the others would hand you crates and encourage you. This was one of my fears as you continued to build the tower, the person on top of the crates got more and more unstable as each crate was put on top of each other the wobblier it got and having to balance while building the tower when you were on it was a task! For me to cope with this, my team encouraged me, and I started singing and praying out loud to physically and spiritually feel safe. Although I was making a lot of noise and having a lot of fun with it. It made me feel safe, we were in a competition with another team and many times I fell off the tower and swung into another team although I was harnessed in it was still a scare. Although I was not stable or really feeling safe, my team were my support and the prayers made me feel at ease.

I decided to have a look at Isaiah just to work out what was going on and to put my mind there. For me I always find it helpful to do this. From reading and a bit of research – the book of Isaiah's main themes are Gods judgement on his people. The book is split from chapters 1 -39 which looks at the fall of man and God's judgement of sin and chapters 40 -66 these chapters carry the theme of hope of Gods new kingdom and for the future. Announcing Gods future hope for the people of Israel and providing comfort, guidance and peace to a new nation. This set up is identical to the bible which has 66 books, 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 in the new just like how the chapters are split.

The first point I want to make from this is God is our Parent

I want to look at the first few verses of this reading - But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel

I find this first sentence really key about what God is saying to his people at the time! God reminds them that he created them and formed them, God is speaking as their creator. For us right now in the Covid 19 crisis this is a loud reminder that God has uniquely created each and every one of us as he is our father.

Now if you are afraid or worried what a simple reminder to not fear because God has created and formed us so clearly, he knows what thoughts we have in our minds.

Then in the next few verses God says - **Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine**

God says not to fear as a **bold command** and then follows this command with promises! These promises are that he has redeemed his people, summoned them and that they are his.

The people of Israel have a good enough excuse to be afraid here as they were scared of the Babylonian army, of war! But God reassures them with these promises, he reminds them that he is their father.

We too have an ongoing battle at the moment within the current pandemic but be reassured God has redeemed you, summoned you by name and that Gods calls you his so do not fear.

I think the theme of God being our parent carries on **in verses 4 – 7**, the concept of not being afraid is not normal for us and hard to do. As humans our brains and emotions cause fear we will always have that feeling of worry within us but controlling that and reducing it is possible through God.

Verse 4 tells us so much about Gods enduring love for us, it reads since you are precious and honoured in my sight.

Knowing we are precious to God is such a powerful promise. Then God goes on to tell us that he loves us and that he would sacrifice others for us. **'I will give people in exchange for you'**

I think this verse is rather similar to the words of **John 3:16** that God would give up his only son for us! In regard to not be afraid, I find this really important. For me this is a constant reminder that God gave up one of his most precious things for us. Jesus died to give us eternal life and that is something we should be eternally grateful for. God is our father; he loves us so much and we are honoured in his sight we can bring any of our worries to him nothing is too silly to give to God we are on a journey with him even when we are afraid.

Then on into verses 5,6 and 7 – I find these verses are so pivotal for the people of Israel. God reminds his people that his presence has and will release them from slavery and exile. God is reminding his people to have hope within the darkness. They do not have to fear or worry as they have hope for the future because they knew they were called by the name of God and they were created for His glory.

For us this too is our promise, we are in darkness at the moment from the virus I will not lie for me this is a worrying time and I do not like the feeling of being vulnerable. So many have lost lives across the world from Covid and it is sad, but we have a future hope because we have been called and created by God. He knows us he is our father and we can give him all our worries and fears to him because of this. And within that unique and special bond we have with God our worries shouldn't be a weight on our shoulders, but we can walk freely with our Father within dark times.

The second point I want to make is God is our protector

As things progress within this time of Covid 19, we can feel rather scared of the outcome of the future and of our health. Although the government are in constant need of physical protection for this virus with PPE, we have God's protection over us and that is something I want to draw on looking at the next few verses.

I want to look at **verses 2 & 3** – 'when you pass through the waters, I will be with you' ... 'when you walk through the fire you will not be burned'. God here is telling us that through any obstacle physical or spiritual he will be with us.

When writing this the song, 'our God' popped into my head I shall leave link for anyone to listen to it after this, but the lyrics are key and really link to God being our protector in uncertain times.

The lyrics go:

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power

....

And if Our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
And if our God is with us, then what can stand against?

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01Yj7H-eSjM>)

This scripture in Isaiah tells us that in our lives we will face trials, God does not say that when we become Christians our lives become easy and there will not be any more suffering, suffering is inevitable. We will still suffer in this lifetime due to the fall of man. And although this does raise many questions and philosophical debates sin and evil are still a firm thing in this world. But what God does tell us that he will protect us and walk with us when we go through these trials. God is going to be with us in the toughest circumstances which is why I think fires and rivers are mentioned as they are dangerous! Fires consume you and floods will overwhelm you but yet God says he will protect you.

This reminds me of the story of Daniel, in Daniel chapter 3 v 25 when he and his three friends and an angel were thrown into a hot fiery furnace because they refused to worship an idol. Yet the king and his officials could see into the furnace that Daniel and his friends were walking around unharmed from the fire,

We too should take this as reminder that we are going through a huge trial at this time, but God will provide us with protection. We should not fear as God is with us and God is our help. We do not have to panic at what is going on right now, we don't have to fear, and we don't have to run as if we didn't trust God. He can strengthen us in our trials that we can walk through the fire and go through the deep waters being reassured that he is with us and that he is our protector

The third point I want to make is God is powerful

Looking to the end part of this passage from **verses 8 – 13** where Gods power is really shown to us through work of witnesses who are appointed by God.

Previously in Isaiah God spoke of His blind and deaf servants, who had freely closed their eyes and ears to His truth by worshiping idols and rejecting God. God gathers all the nation together to speak of this. God invites his people together to justify themselves to why they have rejected his truth and why they have started to worship idols. God is asking them to bring witnesses to justify this.

In verses 10, 11 and 13 I truly see Gods power step in! God is calling his people as his witnesses, the blind people who had walked away from God and were worshiping idols they have no power and cannot claim to be witnesses. But the people of God who are witnesses witness his greatness and power as they have seen it in the past! God says he has revealed, saved and proclaimed his people and those who are witness to him know this is the truth (verse 11).

God says: **'you are my witnesses'**. God called the people of Israel to declare his work and be witnesses to him. To serve God not to just call yourself a witness but to do something, to know the LORD and believe Him in every way! What a powerful promise to be called Gods witness. We too must proclaim this we are witnesses to God we must serve him. We can be a witness to God's grace and power even now.

Being called a witness to God is one of the most powerful things not only can we witness Gods power through Isaiah but learn to be powerful in the current climate. I think we can apply Gods power through looking at verses 10 & 13!

God speaks to his people declaring his power - not only is God the highest God but the only God from ancient times (verse 11)! There was no God formed before the LORD, and there will be no God formed after Him. In verse 10 it really proves Gods power; he is one true God of all time.

God is our only saviour; he is our only hope. God is our source of refuge nothing else should come before this the people who had turned away from God did not follow this they fled away for something they thought was far better for them. Only God can declare and save us, the people who had turned away to something far more important to them were wrong, God is the way the truth and the life as said in John 14:6 even in darkness he provides because he has great power to support us. God should not be our last resort but our first resort the person to go to in all circumstances because he is all powerful. We can be reassured in these dark times that God is near, his power will eventually overrule, and we should turn to him as our first resort within the current situation.

As said, God calls us as witnesses – we all should be like the people of Israel reflecting on previous promises in the past and making sure to put Gods promises into action. In verse 13 – it reads yes from ancient days I am he. God is transcendent above time and space; God has and will always be here. Gods work and power go beyond his saving grace on behalf of his people. He comes before time itself. Before even the notion of time existed, God was there. God's power is infinitely greater than anyone else's power, as he has always been here. If we are afraid, we can lift up our worries to God as he is all powerful, he can work miracles and we can pray on this that through Gods power in this time he will work.

He can rightly say no one can deliver out of my hand, when I act who can reverse it! Gods power is so great no one can do better than God, his promises are always true and acted upon.

I think from this we can learn that Gods power will deliver, to not fear is hard, but we can accept Gods power become his witness and serve him within Covid 19. Through becoming Gods witness, soaking up his word and power we can become stronger we can look to God as our first resort not like the people who turned blind to Gods goodness and ran away but run to God in all circumstances. This then will help us as individuals to give all our worries to God. Be like the people of Israel focus on our only hope, look to God, be reassured by his power that we will get through this pandemic and God will always be here to support us.

So, my three points the three P's! I hope they will all stick in your mind when you start to worry and fear.

1. God is our parent – as Children of God be reassured that God knows us inside and out, any fear we should give it to God. The special bond you have with a parent or child is the same

bond you have with God and that should calm your worries and remind you that God is walking with you on any path life takes you on.

2. God is our protector – just like Daniel you are going to have to walk through fire or go through troubles and trials. God is with you to protect you within any obstacle you may face, through the deep waters or the burning fires of life God does deliver, and he is our protection.
3. God is powerful – looking back in time to the people of Israel be inspired that God's power is within us. This time is only temporary, yet God's power can overcome the darkness and we can reach out to God's power right now to reduce our worries.

Like I was, you may feel like you are on top of a wobbly unstable tower, looking down and feeling rather scared. But pray, adopt these points and be encouraged by others that you will get through the fear and God will be walking by your side. These three points should remind us that even in the darkest of circumstances we need to not worry. Instead of worrying be a witness to God, unpack God's everlasting love and fix your life on God, aligning yourself with him in your walk of life giving the worries you have to him. And when this pandemic passes this should become our norm that God is our first port of call when we are worried.

I would like to end this sermon in a song, I will leave the link below it is called the 'king of my heart' written by Guvna B a famous Christian Rap Artist. I think this can be used as a prayer, that God remains the king in our hearts and in any circumstance he is Good. Our parent, our protector and the one who is all powerful.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am4cCwRUOJE>

Thank you