

Worship Service - *No Fear*

Epiphany 1, Year C,

9th January, 2022

Isaiah 43:1-7 CEV / Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 CEV

Intro/Prelude

[*O Healing River*](#)

Traditional Hymn Melody

Arranged by Kristin Shank Zehr, played by Annie Center

Call to Worship

The heavens open. The Spirit descends. Jesus emerges from the water. And a voice echoes through the blue expanse. "This is my child, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased." Jesus is named. Claimed.

We come to the water. We remember we are named. Claimed. Can it be so? What a thing to be named. Claimed. Let us worship the one who names and claims us still.

I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

As we gather today, let's reflect where we seek our strength together as a community of faith, and how that is reflected in our times together.

Reflection Video

[*Nearer, My God to Thee*](#)

Music by Sarah F. Adams and Lowell Mason,
arranged by Lee Evans, played by Annie Center

Invocation

Most wonderful God, foolish and flawed though we are, we too delight in your beloved Son. As in his name we gather in the house of many praises, may the heavens be opened for us, that we may catch a glimpse of that Light and Love that transforms our common days with a beauty not of our making. Through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen!

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (*light candle*) Amen.

In our reading from Isaiah, we hear of God’s love for God’s people, and the promise they have as believers. As we listen to these words, let’s reflect on where we seek comfort from what concerns us.

Words of the Prophet Isaiah 43:1-7 CEV

Descendants of Jacob, I, the Lord, created you and formed your nation. Israel, don’t be afraid. I have rescued you. I have called you by name; now you belong to me.

When you cross deep rivers, I will be with you, and you won’t drown. When you walk through fire, you won’t be burned or scorched by the flames.

I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, the God who saves you. I gave up Egypt, Ethiopia, and the region of Seba in exchange for you.

To me, you are very dear, and I love you. That’s why I gave up nations and people to rescue you.

Don’t be afraid! I am with you. From both east and west I will bring you together.

I will say to the north and to the south, “Free my sons and daughters! Let them return from distant lands.

They are my people—I created each of them to bring honor to me.”

Scripture Video Isaiah 43:1-7

[Passing Through The Waters](#)

Lectionary bible reading

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a specific request to be included in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

We take joy today in the progress that’s been made by Roger’s great nephew Thomas, Judy’s grandson, in his recovery from the inflammatory syndrome brought on by COVID. But we also continue to lift him in prayer as he still has healing to do.

We remember Myrna in our prayers as she recovers from a nasty bug she acquired during the holidays. Fortunately it wasn’t COVID, but she is drained and weak after a rough week.

Let's also keep Kiausherae in prayer as she works through some personal issues.

Let us quiet our hearts as we celebrate the coming of the One who brings the reign of God to all people, let us pray for the world God loves, the Church God calls, and all people according to their needs.

Pastoral Prayer

God of light and darkness, through water and Word you shine your light into the darkness of our lives. We give thanks for this incredible gift.

God of love and hate, your love comes in spite of our animosity; you bring reconciliation to those who are divided. We pray for better relations between Canada and its native peoples. Strengthen us to be peacemakers.

God of hope and fear, you walk with us through the challenges which surround us. Wash away our anxiety by your promised presence, and set us free from despair.

God of church and world, in baptism you unify yourself with our world, and bring your reign into being. Keep us from seeing your love as a hiding place. Motivate us to infuse the world with your justice.

God of health and illness, there is nothing that separates us from your love. Inspire us to bring your health to the sick, your encouragement to the discouraged, your promise to the dying, especially those we name aloud or in our hearts.

God of life and death, all that exists is from you, and for you. Enable us to trust your baptismal promise, and serve this hurting world. Lord, in your mercy, Hear our prayers.

God who shines in the darkness, receive these prayers and the prayers of our hearts, in the name of the one who is your light, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

In our gospel lesson today, we hear the story of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. As we listen to these words from Luke, let's reflect in what promise we have in the events of that day.

Gospel Lesson Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 CEV

Everyone became excited and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?"

John said, "I am just baptizing with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

His threshing fork is in his hand, and he is ready to separate the wheat from the husks. He will store the wheat in his barn and burn the husks with a fire that never goes out.”

While everyone else was being baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. Then as he prayed, the sky opened up,

and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you.”

Scripture Video **Luke 3:15-17,21-22**

[The Baptism Of Jesus](#)

Lectionary bible reading

Reflection

No Fear

Rev. Glenn Brumbaugh

“The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself.” FDR's quote is pretty straightforward and to the point. He highlights an age-old problem we as human beings have been struggling with since the dawn of time.

Fear. Fear is the cause of so many problems in our lives. Being a bit of a sci-fi geek, well, OK, more than just a bit, I'm reminded of a quote from Yoda in the Star Wars movies. “Fear is the path to the Dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering” The suffering is not just endured by the recipient of hate. Fear and hate lead to suffering and turmoil in those who harbor it as well. They take a physical and emotional toll on all involved. Fear is the root of many of the problems of our world. But what do we fear?

Is it the unknown? Change? Threats to us and our loved ones? Digging a little deeper, most of our fear really stems from a lack of control in a situation. We are unsure what the outcome will be, and it sends us into fight or flight response mode. We can try to reason our way out, but we're always fighting against our inherent biology which is designed to help us survive.

Living through a pandemic makes this fear glaringly obvious. We want to be in control, to keep ourselves safe. We desperately want a daily life that is familiar, one that fits into what we consider “normal.” Yet so much in our daily lives is out of our control. So where do we go from here? How do we handle the fears and worries that we are bound to encounter? Our faith is certainly a good place to start.

God tells us not to fear or be afraid over 100 times in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus asks his disciples and followers why they are afraid repeatedly, as well as admonishing them not to fear.

In our scripture from Isaiah today, God tells us not to fear. Not even when flood waters ravage around us, or when we are consumed by fire. In other words, there is

nowhere that God is not with us. Yet worry and fear still dog us. Especially when we're young. We fear the dark, the imaginary creatures under the bed. Even then, though, we still try to find ways of our own in order to cope. Maybe it's a nightlight, or checking under the bed. Or keeping every inch of your bodies under the covers cause you know the monsters can't get you if nothing is sticking out from under the blankets, right? Or maybe it's the ingenuity of little Johnny in this little anecdote.

5-year old Johnny was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup, but he didn't want to go in alone. "It's dark in there and I'm scared." She asked again, and he persisted. Finally she said, "It's OK--Jesus will be in there with you." Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark, and started to leave when all at once an idea came, and he said: "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me that can of tomato soup?" It's a humorous example, but it makes a good point.

Where can we go that God is not with us? If God is with us even in the valley of the shadow of death, why do we still worry and fear so? Some are better able to face their fears than others, which probably speaks more to self-confidence than anything else. And it's important to have a good measure of that, as made in God's image we all have a spark of the divine to take pride in. But how do we go about getting rid of those things which we can't control, or are part of the unknown to us? And this is not a problem limited to just individuals.

We as a nation seem to wallow in fear these days. Our culture seems so divided by fear and concern that's expressed in bitterness and divisiveness on both sides of the political spectrum. We are consumed by the fear that we are not in control of our circumstances, and the fear that we are losing all that is familiar and anchors our sense of what is normal, what is right. Unfortunately, we often look for others to blame for this fear, for this uneasiness with finding ourselves in unfamiliar circumstances.

We have become a people of "us vs. them." So much of the rhetoric expressed today is so harsh. and further exacerbated by the media for their own gain. Long gone are the days when the news was just the news. Granted I personally am much too young to remember the days of the CBS evening news with Walter Cronkite. But were I old enough, I'm sure I would have felt that you could trust him to give you the real news without a lot of spin. But now we have 24 hour, internet-driven media that fights against one another for viewers and ratings. Only the juiciest news matters, the news that gets the most people riled up and afraid, and whoever can get it out faster gets the prize. So we have this site or station for this point of view and another one for those with the opposing point of view. It goes both ways.

Rachel Maddow spins her stories just as much as Tucker Carlson. Each slant on the news is very capable at further reinforcing your worries and concerns, and painting the other side as the root of all evil, more often than not making the opposition seem

less than human, not being worth the common decency and dignity we are all entitled to.

Unfortunately, on both sides of the coin, there are those who allow their fear and hatred to cross the line into acts of harassment and physical violence. Individuals on both sides have harassed and committed violence. Fear is a real problem with real consequences. There is a lot of fear to go around these days, isn't there? The problem of divisive fear isn't limited to our politics either.

It can be found in the church as well. Churches worry that they aren't big enough, that they don't have enough resources, that they won't make it. So how do we resolve this? What is our role as followers of Christ? What we need, according to the writer of Isaiah, is to hear how God gives us identity and value.

In Isaiah 43, the prophet speaks to a people bloodied, bruised, and beleaguered. As punishment for Israel's arrogance and disobedience, God has permitted Israel to be conquered by the Babylonians and thrown into exile. The tender words of Isaiah 43 remind these exiles who they are and whose they are, despite their fears and desperation. They are a people valued and honored by God. Like Jesus in our gospel reading, they are beloved. The One who made them has not turned away from them. They need not fear their plight or their foes, the chaos of the waters, or the dangers of the fire.

As God's chosen people of today, we too have the same promises. The prophet reminds us that our core identity lies not in our roles as individuals, or in our relative size and wealth as congregations, but in God's identification of us as "precious in my sight, and honored." Our sense of belonging comes not from the acceptance of our peers or the status of our communities but from the One who claims us and will never let us go.

So how do we live out a life that focuses not on our earthly associations and the fear they generate, but on our place as sheep in the flock that God shepherds? The first step is to not lose sight of the humanity we all share. We all have fears and insecurities. We all too often seek ways to make ourselves feel secure and seek answers in places that don't provide us the security we seek. We look to our identities as individuals and as parts of larger groups.

When we identify too strongly with our groups, we often view those who don't belong as threats. It becomes all too easy to see them as a side in an argument instead of the individual human beings that they are, deserving of respect and dignity.

The behavior of some people I see today disturbs me. I know I was raised to treat everybody with respect and politeness, to do unto others as you would have done to you. But we need to have the same respect whether talking with them, or about them. The second step is to learn about the things that cause us fear, particularly in

other people. And the best way for that to happen is to actually talk to or interact with those you don't agree with or understand. It's hard to build bridges when you dig deeper divides. Whether it's those who choose the comfort of living in denial, not acknowledging the reality of the new reality they find themselves in, or those who ridicule them and seek to minimize their real worries. Whether it's those who accept this new "normal" and try to take all the necessary measures, or those who try to seek scapegoats like immigrants or minorities to blame.

Whomever we are encouraged to fear at the moment, where is it that we get the information that drives our fear. Is it from people who look and think like us, or is it members of those actual communities? Do we actually try to understand where they are coming from, what really drives those fears, and try to address it? Or do we listen to the opinion of people who tell us what we should think, on the news, in social media and internet platforms? Finally, the question we need to ask ourselves is, why do we hold so tightly to our fears in the first place?

In Matthew 6 Jesus tells us, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" What does holding on to fear do for us?

The fact that we are all sitting here today implies that we have made it through our fears to this point. It can be difficult to let go, but God makes clear in Isaiah that we have nothing to fear. No matter what, our place with our Creator is assured. So what do we have to fear? Or should we instead live a fearless life, one that rests assured in the care and concern of our God and Savior? One that is made of love for one another, from a God who IS love incarnate. The choice is ours, to hold onto fear and all the negativity that comes with it, or let it go and live the lives of compassion we are called to. May it be so, Amen.

Call to Serve.

When we give of ourselves, we are witnesses to the transforming love of God in Christ. May we all give of ourselves as generously as we have received.

As we continue to seek to be a place of compassion and support to our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry that seeks to promote the growth of God's shalom around us. Today, as we listen to the powerful words of the following hymn, How Firm A Foundation, let's reflect on how we might better give our fears

over to our faith in God, and how we might work to understand and help others to find that same strength and solace.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [Video]

[*How Firm A Foundation*](#)

performed by Grace Community Church
Sun Valley, California,
posted to YouTube by Martijn de Groot

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Accept whatever gifts we have to offer, we humbly pray, O God.
Let them give you honor and glory as we serve the needs of your people.
And let the called and redeemed of God say, Amen

Blessing/Assurance

Go now,

confident that you are God's precious and pleasing children. Trust in God and do not fear. Accept the Word of God and point others to the one who baptises with Spirit and fire.

And may God be your protection and your strength; May Christ baptise you with his Holy Spirit. And may the Spirit be with you to empower you and give you peace.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord, ...In the name of Christ. Amen.

Postlude

[*Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*](#)

Arranged by Lee Evans, played by Annie Center