

Isaiah 43:1-5
Walk Through, With God
Rev. Jonathan P. Cornell
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Once again, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. You know one aspect I love about the story and tradition of which we are a part is that Christians know how to party. We've been given the greatest news the world will ever hear, that death does not have the last word, and get to share that with people everywhere. The way that Jesus shared himself with others was in the context of a feast or celebration. People have forever noted that in the Gospels Jesus seemed to be going from one party to the next. It's what got him in such trouble with the religious people of his day. But when the news is the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, or the resurrection of the dead how can we not celebrate?

So, for the next 50 days until Pentecost we will celebrate Easter. I encourage you to greet one another with the Easter response: He is risen. He is risen indeed!

But like the first Easter, that news of resurrection, of life in the face of death, was a message that faced overwhelming cultural odds. Just imagine how a handful of people showing up at a tomb and encountering death-defying news would have faced incomparable odds when taking it to the world. And even though they were crossing into brand new territory, and even though the road ahead was completely unknown to them, they were going with God.

Well we're beginning a new series of messages I've entitled "Crossing Life's Rivers." At one time or another we will all find ourselves moving from one place in life to another—crossing a proverbial river. More often than not getting from one place to another involves stepping out into some pretty uncertain territory. We are all crossing through something right now we've never seen, and the way is unclear, but we can know who goes with us.

For the next 5 weeks we'll be looking at the story of Joshua who led God's chosen people from their time in the Desert Wilderness across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land.

This is an image we can wrap our minds around, right? In one way or another we've all had to transition from one stage in life to another, whether it's from student to working person, from working to retired, perhaps it was from single to married...or maybe it happened to be the other way around. Maybe you've lost a job at one time or another and had to navigate between that place of financial security, and a feeling of worry or uncertainty about how all the bills are going to get paid. Why even as a church it is as if we are standing in that Jordan River together—able to see what is behind us, where we've been—and we're looking out over the horizon to where God is leading us in our future. Right now, things may seem very uncertain, but God is walking with us through the waters onto dry ground, onto land that is secure and permanent.

Well the message God has for us this morning is that to get from one place to another we've got to walk through the river. We've got to step out into the place of uncertainty and move forward.

But when we step out, the prophet Isaiah reminds us that we walk through with God. Walk through with God. I was telling someone recently the story of my years in college as a camp counselor at Camp Ojibway—our church's beloved summer camp on the pristine shores of Lake Mudhen in Siren Wisconsin. Each year as a camp staff we would host a group from inner city Minneapolis from our Time for Tots program. And every year we would float down the St. Croix River in inner tubes. Well one particular year we successfully floated about 4 out of our 6 mile trip when some very dark and ominous clouds began to roll in and soon enough (snap, snap, snap) rain began to fall and (clap, clap, clap) lightning began to strike all around us. Now what you have to know is that these kids were terrified of the water to begin with and just getting them on their tubes was a stretch. But a rainstorm, this sent them all into a complete tailspin.

Because of lightning, we did the prudent thing and got them off the water and onto the shore where we would hike the remaining two miles. Unfortunately this was a stretch of river that had no good paths to walk along the banks. Instead we trudged with 60 terrified middle schoolers through reeds taller than we were in a torrential downpour, not knowing when it would all come to an end. Believe me none of us wanted to be there at that moment. We would have loved for God to just beam us up out of that place, but we had to walk through...with God. We couldn't turn around, because it would have been further to go back, so we had to walk through...with God.

So, we make it to the bus, where we load up all the kids and drive them safely back to Camp to clean up and get ready for dinner. And what do you suppose is their first response when they sit down for dinner? THAT WAS AWESOME! I wasn't scarred at all.

To arrive in the promised lands of life, to get to that place where we see God's faithful plan in the rearview mirror we've got to walk through with God.

This morning we're not actually going to begin in Joshua, I'd like for us first to look at the book of Isaiah at what will be, for us, a sort of preamble to this story of Joshua leading God's people from their wilderness. Isaiah chapter 43 verse 1-5 and when I'm done I'll say this is the word of the Lord so that if you believe it to be true you can respond by saying "thanks be to God."

But now, thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 2 When (not conditional "if" circumstantial "when") you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. 4 Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. 5 Fear not, for I am with you;

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but what we just read never will. Amen

Well the first thing I think it is good for us to be reminded of is that walk through we must. With that group of kids we had no choice but to lead them forward. Remaining in the same place would get us nowhere. We all face river crossings in our lives, no one is exempt from the passage. It is not a matter of whether we will pass through waters, no, Isaiah says **“WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE WATERS.”** In this way Isaiah sort of reminds me of a big brother, or a grandpa who is giving some very important life lessons to a young one. Here he sort of grabs us by the shoulder and says, “Listen, in my experience I’ve had to walk through some pretty tough stuff. But I want to tell you that this is part of life, but don’t worry because God is with you.

There is a wonderful line from the first book of the Lord of the Rings Trilogy, the Fellowship of the Ring. In it Frodo says to Gandalf as they are temporarily stranded in the mines of Moria: “I wish the ring had never come to me.” And Gandalf says, “so do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.”

You see as followers of Christ we believe that it is not only that we walk through the rivers and through challenging times, but we walk through them with Christ...with God. There is a theology out there that says that bad things shouldn’t happen to faithful people, and if something difficult is happening to you right now, it’s because you aren’t good enough or have strong enough faith. I want to say that this is very destructive theology. Jesus said, **“It rains on the just and the unjust alike.”**

We worship a sovereign God, and God creates life to glorify himself. Do you realize this? The most profound demonstration of God’s glory is the miracle of the very person sitting right next to you. Each one of us, every human life bears the reflection of God’s glory, and that goes for all life, period! Author and Pastor John Piper said it this way: Man (the Hebrew word here is *adam* and literally means human) was created from the beginning *in God’s image* that he might image forth *God’s* glory. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:31 says it this way, **“Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”** Jesus in Matthew 5 from the Sermon on the Mount says **“Let your light so shine among men that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven.”**

Little Will, the name they gave him, even his life will bring glory to God, it’s just that we don’t see it right now. Missy and I simply refuse to believe that God would do any differently.

This brings us to what I see as the second important lesson from Isaiah this morning: In God’s eyes we are first and foremost, redeemed! The Message of Easter is that the work of the cross atones for your sin and mine, past, present, and future. This is not a statement of transaction, this isn’t a conditional statement, it’s a statement of fact. God has redeemed us, so don’t fear? Moving out into the uncertain waters of life is possible when we know there is someone who has already said, you’re important, you’re valuable, your life has infinite meaning.

Imagine with me the illustration of a little child. If my son Conner, who in a year or two will go off to full day school. And imagine if I were to say to him: “Go out there son and create a life of meaning for yourself, pull yourself up by your Velcro bootstraps and forge an identity of your very own, oh and you’re going to have to do it all by yourself without any help from us.” Imagine the insecurity this would breed for a 7 year old. How would he approach the world? Wary, defensive, individualistic, self-promoting.

Now hear the thing we will say to him one day: “You are infinitely precious and important to me and your mama, go follow your heart and remember that you are created in God’s image and bear Jesus with you where you go.” Of course Conner is going to be more likely to thrive and forge forward with a life of meaning when he knows something of his own value to another goes with him.

God says that very thing to us. You are redeemed, you are valuable, you are loved so step out into those waters. Here in Isaiah God actually reveals himself to Isaiah, God says to Isaiah, “Hello Isaiah, I’m God, and this is my plan: You will pass through waters and they won’t overwhelm you, you will walk through fire and they will not consume you.”

We can step out, we can walk through with confidence because God has not only revealed himself to us, he’s promised that all the things that life can throw at us none of them will bring us to harm.

So what does that mean for us as Wabash Presbyterian Church? What does it mean for you as an individual wherever you find yourself now? What does it mean for us to be walking forward with God? I think it means that because God walks through with us, we can walk through with others. As God is with us, we can be with others.

And as we gather ourselves and prepare for the future, there is a temptation to focus inviting others to be with us—even if that place might be a river. God not only reminds us who we are, God also shows us a way out into the future. And friends, the future of the Christian Church is not just Gospel preached, it’s gospel lived, not just through programs and services, but through individuals bearing Christ to one another, person to person. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:10 says that **we are always carrying around within us the death of Christ** (which means we take that story of his sacrificial love with us into our earthly relationship), as Paul says, **so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.** The new territory of our ministry could just be meeting people who don’t quite look like us, or talk like us, or act like us, but who live near us, and being Christ to them.

We are standing in the river, our crossroads, the past behind us and the future ahead. And the way to walk is shown to us by Jesus, who as the author of Hebrews said in chapter 12 **walked through scorn and shame, the defeat of the cross for the sake of those he loved.** And it’s because Jesus freely gave himself for our sin on the cross, we can say with courage and boldness that we can press on. We can walk through. Because the great promise of our faith is that because Christ walks through with us in the depths we can walk through with God. Say that with me three times, walk through...with God x3.

Let us pray.