

Isaiah 43:1-7 + Turn to the Lord Who Gets Results + Series: Turn to the Lord
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 5th Sunday in Lent + 18 March 2018

Some years ago when we first moved here, Lisa and I had a family heirloom that we wanted to reframe and put up in our dining room. Many years before, my great-great grandmother had crocheted a large, lace doily. The detail work was impressive, but the original frame for the doily had suffered water damage a couple years before. Dingy water spots covered the entire doily. We wondered if we would ever be able to get it clean. We had heard the loud, obnoxious commercials for OxiClean, so we gave it a try.

We mixed OxiClean in with some water—and then the moment of truth. Lisa and her mom carefully removed the doily from its old frame and placed it in the water. We weren't sure if the old heirloom would come clean or disintegrate, but we had no need to fear. The doily was made well and OxiClean did what its advertising had promised. The spots were gone and the old doily was a brilliant white. The doily hangs in our dining room to this day.

Now this isn't meant to be another infomercial for OxiClean, but we all like products that get results. We like products that do exactly what the advertising promises. In fact, that desire for good results goes beyond shopping. We hope that programs, companies, jobs, NCAA brackets, and politicians get results. When someone makes a promise, we expect them to keep their promise, to come through and get results.

Typically, we'd be foolish to expect results from God. Who are we to tell God what we expect? Our expectations are often too self-centered, too selfish, but this morning the Lord invites us to expect results from him. He makes some promises—some very clear, very big promises—and he promises results. So this morning we **TURN TO THE LORD WHO GETS RESULTS.**

What makes the Lord's pitch to his people all the more impressive is how unexpected it actually is. In the verses before our text, God states pretty clearly what he thought about his people. ***"They were not willing to walk in his ways, and they would not listen to his instruction. So he poured out his furious anger...on Jacob."*** (Isaiah 42:24-25) They had all turned their backs on the Lord. They had turned to other gods or other rulers. They had willingly disobeyed him. They had refused to listen to his Word. So they found themselves ***"plundered," "looted," "trapped in holes,"*** and ***"imprisoned in dungeons."*** (Isaiah 42:22) For such rejection, their cousins to the north had been scattered into exile. Their descendants would see their cities destroyed, their land ravaged, and their families hauled off into exile—most never to return.

So what would you expect the Lord to say after promising such destruction? You'd probably expect anger, rejection, condemnation. Yet rather than rejection, the Lord speaks of redemption. ***"Now this is what the LORD says—the one who created you, Jacob, and the one who formed you, Israel..."***

Isaiah wasn't making empty promises to give God's people false hope when they were at their lowest, expecting God to wipe them off the face of the earth. No, he pointed them to the Lord who had carefully formed each of them. Through his inspired prophet, God told them, ***"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine."***

Like a loving father who knows each of his beloved children by name, the Lord knew each of his followers as his own. Yet unlike even the most loving father, who can only do so much, God could also speak as their Redeemer. He would send a Savior to be their substitute to ransom them from their slavery to sin and guilt and death. They had no need to fear.

They could expect the Lord to keep his promises and get results. The Lord reminded his people of what he had accomplished for their ancestors when they traveled to the Promised Land. ***"I will be with you when you pass through the waters and when you pass through the rivers...when you walk through the fire..."***

Centuries earlier, the Lord had protected his people when the Egyptian army tried to destroy the Israelites. God with his mighty hand held back the hostile army, while parting the deep waters of the Red Sea for his people to pass through to the other side. Later when it was time for them to cross the flooded Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, the Lord stopped the water so they could cross over. So what's the Lord saying here? What's his point?

It really isn't the water or the fire. God's point is this: ***"I will be with you..."*** Yes, the Lord holds power over all creation. He can even alter the natural properties of water and fire, but more importantly, God wants his people to know that he will keep them from being consumed and destroyed. Why? ***"I will be with you..."*** How could he make that promise? ***"For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior."*** Were they

worried about the future? ***“I will be with you...”*** Were they worried about what would happen to their loved ones? ***“I will be with you...”*** Were they worried about what they would have to endure? ***“I will be with you... For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior.”***

...But a time was still coming when God’s people would have to face the destruction of their land and the exile of their families to a faraway place. What then? Would the Lord ever bring them back? For God, it was already a done deal. ***“I have given Egypt as a ransom for you, Cush and Seba in your place...I will give people in exchange for you and nations instead of your life.”*** The Lord who holds power over all creation also holds power over human events, even the rise and fall of nations. Why does that matter? The Lord guides all of history for the sake of his people—to save them. Not only would the Lord set his Old Testament people free from exile, but he would also guide all things until the right time came to set us, his New Testament people, free from the slavery of sin and guilt and death.

Why does God do this? ***“Because you are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you...”*** The Lord looks at each of his believers whether in the past, the present, or the future, and sees us as his ***“precious,”*** beloved children. He covers us with honor only he can give. Why? ***“I love you...”*** The Lord loves each and every one of us. There’s no doubt about that!

So the Lord promised to be with his people through thick and thin. He promised to guide all of history for their sake, but the Lord had one more promise—a promise on the grandest of scales, a promise that from this point forward will build up to Jesus being lifted up on a cross 700 years later. ***“Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back!’ Bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who bears my name and is created for my glory. I have formed them; indeed, I have made them.”***

To a people worried about the future, worried about their families, worried about what would happen in the dark days ahead, the Lord made a tremendous promise. He promised to gather his saints, his people from every corner of the earth, his people of every age. The Lord promised to gather them to himself, and nothing would be able to prevent him from doing so. When the right time would come, when Christ would be lifted up on a cross, the Lord would rescue soul after soul from eternal death by drawing them to himself.

Nearly 2,800 years have passed since God made those promises to his people. Did the Lord come through? Did he accomplish what he promised? Does he still get results today?

Looking back, how often haven’t we had ears, but failed to listen to the instruction of his Word? How often haven’t we had eyes, but failed to see what the Lord has done and continues to do for us? How often haven’t we had minds, but failed to understand that our Lord has been constantly working for our eternal good? How often haven’t we been like the ancient Jews, willingly allowing ourselves to be plundered or imprisoned with sin or guilt or temptation? We all have failed to walk in God’s ways. We all deserve his wrath.

Yet looking back, you can also see our heavenly Father’s love for us, his children. The Lord who formed us calms our fears, quiets our concerns, and removes our guilt because he has called us by name. You are his own because the Lord ***“has redeemed you.”*** The Lord has ransomed you from the slavery of sin and guilt and Satan. In Christ, the Lord has set you free from your self-made prison. In Christ, the Lord has kept his every promise to you.

“I will be with you when you pass through the waters and when you pass through the rivers...when you walk through the fire... For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior.” When life has been at its worst for you, when you’ve faced loss or grief or pain or suffering, when you’ve struggled with weakness or temptation, what has God done for you? He has been with you with his gracious and almighty presence. Why? He is your God. He is your holy Savior.

“I will give people in exchange for you and nations instead of your life.” The Lord doesn’t reveal how he has guided human history, even the rise and fall of nations, so you can hear the good news of Christ and be brought to faith in him. Yet we know how God guided history to save us. He sent Jesus into a very real time in history to a very real location on the globe to a very real family to live a very real life and suffer a very real death. These are historical facts, but more importantly, they speak to something greater. The Lord guided history to save you, to ransom you, to set you free for all eternity. Why? ***“You are precious in my sight and honored, and I love you...”***

Finally, the Lord has promised to ***“bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who bears my name and is created for my glory.”*** God has been accomplishing this since the beginning of time. The gospel of Jesus goes out to every place on the face of the earth, and with that gospel, the Lord rescues souls. That’s comforting because the Lord has called us and others through the gospel. Yet that’s also reassuring as we reach out to the people we know and love with the gospel. That’s reassuring as we support the work of pastors and teachers and missionaries in other communities, other states, other countries around the world. Someday when we get to heaven, we will see what true diversity looks like with people ***“from every nation, tribe, people, and language”*** gathered around the throne of the Lamb and joining us in praising him for all eternity. (Revelation 7:9)

The Lord gets results. So are you worried about the future? Turn to the Lord, who promises, ***“Do not fear, for I am with you...”*** Are you worried about what’s going to happen to your family? ***“Do not fear, for I am with you...”*** Are you worried about what’s going to happen to God’s people or the gospel in this hostile world? ***“Do not fear, for I am with you...”*** With that gospel, the Lord calls and gathers his people from everywhere. The Lord guides all things for your good and the good of his people. So when you worry, when you are afraid, when you are uncertain, look no further than the Lord who gets results. Amen.