

## **“YOU ARE MINE”**

*Isaiah 43:1,2*

Those words we have just heard (David Adams on Dave Bainbridge & David Fitzgerald’s *Eye of the Eagle* CD) are from *Isaiah 43:1,2*. They have been a source of comfort to God’s people down through the centuries – and, boy, do we need to hear them now. We’ve spent some time this morning thinking about and thanking God for the good things that have happened during the past year – and there have been, as always, plenty of things that have been good about the year – but, let’s face it, we are going to remember 2020 not for the good things, but for the rubbish year that it has been for pretty well all of us.

For most of this year we have lived with the anxieties and restrictions of the coronavirus, Covid-19. It has dominated our newspapers and television programmes, affected our holidays and our celebrations, our education and our healthcare, our worship and our outreach, our families and our friends. And, on top of everything else, it pretty well destroyed the plans most of us had made for celebrating Christmas. Let’s face it, we are sick and tired of the situation and starting to crumble under the pressures and demands that it is putting upon us all. We need some comfort. We are probably familiar with those words from Isaiah, and with all other little slogans from the Bible that we have been using to try and cheer each other up. They trip off our tongues so glibly and, when things aren’t quite as bad as they are now, that brand of Patience Strong piety can actually be a help to many people. But we need not simply to hear them, but to know them, to feel them making a difference.

God is saying to his people here that he is with them – with them through the fire and the rain, in the floods and the furnace of their struggles with life. It is a promise of his presence. But, given what has been happening all around us – and for many of us, actually to us – it’s sometimes difficult to believe that, isn’t it? If we’re honest, I’m sure all of us would say that there have been times this year when God has seemed very far away. There are those who have said that they have been very much aware of the prayers of other people and have been sure that God has been helping them, but all of us need that reassurance, don’t we?

So God says to his people, “Look, don’t worry. I have redeemed you.” There is already evidence of his helping them out of difficult situations, standing with them in times of crisis before. He had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt – the event in their history that had been most formative and fundamental for them, something that they remember even to this day. He had rescued them from other invaders and oppressors in the centuries between the Exodus and the preaching of Isaiah. They have had their ups and downs, to be fair, but God has always brought them through. He has brought them back from the brink and given them a hope for the future. He can do it. He has done it. He can do it again.

And through these words spoken by a foreign prophet, centuries ago in a land and culture so very different from ours, God still speaks to us today. He still says, “Look, don’t worry. I have redeemed you.” What we have just been celebrating – albeit in a rather less extravagant fashion than usual – is the proof of that: God sending his Son, Jesus, into our world to offer us a way out of the oppression that is caused by sin and evil, to show us that he cares, to give us a hope and a future – to redeem us. As Jesus grew up and followed his inexorable destiny to the cross, he was assuring us, yet again, that God is with us, that he is drawing us back to himself, to that wonderful relationship of love and trust that he always intended us to have with him. Through the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus, God has given us a hope for the future despite the issues with which we are grappling now, and the situations that cause us distress even without a virus to cope with. As we have said so often, he’s helped us before and he can help us again.

But notice that these words aren’t simply a blanket, “Don’t worry: it’ll be alright” for everyone – a kind of mass panacea that will sort it all out and you might want to include yourself in that. God says, “*I have called you by name; you are mine.*” This is God’s word to you personally this morning – you, there on your settee or sitting up in bed or watching this with a coffee at the kitchen table or trying to pull a toddler out from under the telly or trying to remember if you’ve put the oven on yet or still rubbing your damp eyes after the worst week you can remember. Whoever you are, wherever you are – if you’re hearing this for the very first time or being reminded of it for the umpteenth time – God is speaking to you.

He is saying that he knows you – your hurts, your fears, your joys, your anxieties, your successes, your failure, your resentments, your plans and projects, your faults and your achievements. He knows you and because of that – maybe, you may think, despite all that – you are his. You matter to him. He loves you. For goodness’ sake, he loves you enough to have sent Jesus to die for you and to make a difference to you. He’s not going to let you go now. He will bring you – you, personally – through this. There are signs of hope on the horizon and we pray that it will not be too long before the combination of better treatment and a vaccine for this disease enable us to return to a life which is less troubling and worrying. And whatever else may be dragging you down at the moment – worries about finance or family or employment or relationships or education or whatever – God is there for you, to reassure you and uphold you.

This morning, at the end of this awful year, call out to him again – call out to him for the very first time – and believe that God will stand with you in your need. He won’t necessarily take away the problem – he does say “*When ...*” not “*If ...*” here – but he does say “*I will be with you.*”. Go on. God really can make a difference. Dare to believe it.