

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7

Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny.
—C.S. Lewis

This reading from Isaiah 43 is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. God says to Isaiah — and through him to all of God’s people — “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you” (v. 2). But what does he mean?

Notice that the text does not say that God pushes us into the water. God doesn’t pull him or push him into the flames of adversity.

God simply says, “When.” “When this happens, when you have a river to cross, a fire to dash through, well, at that time I will be with you because you are mine. You belong to me!”

For about 60 years, the people of Israel lived in captivity in Babylon, far from their homes in Palestine. They were feeling discouraged, dispirited and depressed, wondering if they would ever be able to return.

But now, as their exile is about to end, Isaiah reminds them that God has created them, formed them, rescued them and called them by name. “You are mine,” says the Lord (v. 1). “You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you” (v. 4).

Notice that Isaiah is not promising an easy path for the people of Israel, or for us. Swirling waters will come, right along with raging rivers and searing fires. But in the face of all of these challenges, “I will be with you,” promises God.

Isaiah knows that God is powerful and compassionate, a God who is always with and for us. Think about this: *With and for us.*

This is the God who was with and for the people of Israel as they escaped captivity in Egypt and passed through the waters of the Red Sea. This is the God who was with and for the apostle Paul as he passed through the waters of the Mediterranean and ended up shipwrecked on the Island of Malta (Acts 27-28). This is the God who is with and for us when we face troubles of our own, as well as when we pass through the waters of baptism, die and rise with Jesus, and end up as part of the body of Christ.

—Timothy Merrill with Henry G. Brinton

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for being present with us and for us in every time and place and situation, even in the most difficult challenges we face. In Jesus’ name. Amen.