

**“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.”**

This text holds a special place in my heart because when I was a vicar, my vicarage supervisor, Pastor Poppe, would take me on homebound visits, and he would read this passage before communing the person we were visiting. Now the shoe is on the other foot, and I have the privilege of serving as a vicarage supervisor, and I get to read this same passage to the homebound members I visit.

However, if we’re honest, 1. (oops!) It doesn't feel like the Lord created, formed, redeemed, or called me (v. 1). When you look in the mirror, you see the imperfections staring back at you. If you’re older, you wish for the days when you were younger and had less gray hairs and wrinkles. You wish you could get around as easily as you once could. If you’re younger, you see the blemishes, and you wish you were stronger, prettier, or faster than your classmate at school. Has the Lord really created and formed me?

In our minds, we know that Jesus died for our sins. But we don’t feel holy and righteous. We still sin. Addictions can cripple us. We have angry outbursts at our family. We sometimes lie. We sometimes use foul language. We fail to help others. We look at ourselves and ask, has Jesus really redeemed *me*?

We know we are Christians, but sometimes, we doubt. Yes, the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. But I haven’t heard a voice from heaven calling out my name saying that I’m going to heaven and that I’m in the Lambs Book of Life. Has the Holy Spirit really called me?

What’s more, we get this promise from the Lord in verse 2:  
**“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.”**

That seems too good to be true. Where is the Lord when I pass through

the waters of self-doubt and anxiety? When I'm drowning in rivers of making ends meet or getting through my busy week, does God care?

When the fire of sickness, injury, and death strike, is the Lord manning the fire hose or is He just letting it burn down? When the flames of my own sinful choices threaten to ruin my life, does Jesus sit back and say, "You had it coming." The truth is 2. (ugh!) I feel alone in trials (v. 2).

Does the Lord love me? How can I know he cares? How can I know that He'll follow through on His promises. We get a hint at the answer in verse 3, "**For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you.**" Verse 3 reminds us of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt.

If you recall, the Israelites were oppressed in slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh saw that they were multiplying greatly, so he committed genocide against their firstborn sons by instructing the Egyptians to throw Israelite boys into the Nile River. Pharaoh made the Israelites do hard labor, and they suffered under his rule.

The Lord raised up Moses, whose name means drawn from the water, and through a series of plagues, the Lord convinced hard-hearted Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. The most memorable of them being the night of the Passover wherein the blood of the lamb on the doorposts told the angel of death to pass over the houses of the Israelites, but to visit the houses of the Egyptians, killing their firstborn sons.

The Israelites fled Egypt in haste, and the Lord miraculously split the waters of the Red Sea letting the Israelites pass through without getting their feet wet, when they passed through, the waters returned, drowning Pharaoh and his army who were pursuing. As the Israelites remembered this, they would remember that the Lord even gave Egypt as their ransom, that's how much He loved them!

But it gets even better, we read in verse 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.”** How do we know that God loves us? He tells us right here! And He gave a man in exchange for us.

There is an idiosyncrasy about this translation. The verse reads that the Lord will give a man in return for you—not men. Literally, God will give Adam for you! Isaiah prophesies of a man who will come to offer Himself in exchange for us. We know that man to be Jesus Christ.

On this Baptism of our Lord Sunday, we reflect on the baptism of Jesus Christ, that Second Adam, of whom the Father said, **“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”** In baptism, that saying becomes true of us. We are also the beloved sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. We are beloved children because Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. **BECAUSE THE LORD GAVE A MAN IN EXCHANGE FOR ME, I CAN KNOW GOD LOVES ME.** 3. (aha!) He sent a man in exchange for my life (v. 4).

What’s more, we see that it isn’t just me that He loves. We continue reading, **“Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you. I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,”**

There’s something about my vicarage supervisor reading that passage with the homebound member. No matter how depressed, lonely, or sick the homebound member may have been, in that moment, they were not alone. Pastor Poppe and I were there to keep them company, to encourage them, and to listen to their concerns. But even more, Pastor Poppe was there with the gift of Christ Himself in, with, and under bread and wine to comfort, to encourage, and to forgive the sins of the person we visited.

Today, this ministry still continues as I visit our homebound members, but you don’t need to be a homebound member to receive this gift. The Holy Spirit gathers people from the north—Onalaska, south—

Stoddard, Genoa, and Ferryville, east—Coon Valley, Westby, and Viroqua, and west—La Crescent and Winona to be here as the assembly of Saints at Faith Lutheran Church.

We are the baptized who gather together before the body and blood of the Lord Jesus who the Lord has created, formed, redeemed, and called. We are the ones made Holy by the God who loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins.

And guess what, there's likely someone sitting in a pew in this room right now who has had a struggle similar to what you're going through right now. There's someone who might have the same temptations as you. There's someone going through the same rivers and walking through the same fire that you're facing. Not only does God go with you through these, but He provides you brothers and sisters in Christ who can pray with you, who can read Scripture with you, and who can offer a hand to hold and a shoulder to cry on. 4. (whee!) The Lord loves not just me, but all my brothers and sisters (v. 5–6).

And so we start where we left off in verse 7. Who are these promises for? **“Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”**” Indeed, there may be imperfections, but the Lord does indeed love us! He sent His own Son to die for our sins, and He won't let us down when we need Him most. He has called our names and claimed us through baptism. He has given us the gift of the Church to encourage us through this desert journey. So we can say with confidence, 5. (yeah!) Yes, the Lord created, formed, and called me (v. 7)!