

Sermon for January 10, 2016
Luke 3 Baptism of Jesus

“His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.” For some reason when I read the passage this time my mind was drawn to this verse. Maybe it was because of the holidays and I was thinking about growing up on the farm and how I would clean the oats for the spring planting. Or maybe it was because I received popcorn kernels for Christmas that I was thinking about how we raised our own popcorn and how we would blow the chaff away from the popcorn. We would rub the popcorn kernels off of the cob into these huge pans and when the one was full we would take it outside and pour from one pan into the other and let the wind blow away the paper thin chaff.

When doing these things I knew I was doing them because we didn’t want any weed seeds to be in the oats or anything else that would plug up the nozzle the seeds would go through and we really didn’t want all that chaff to be in the popcorn we would eat. We did it to get more of the good stuff—the oats and popcorn.

I’ve come to see this verse now as just that—Jesus is using his winnowing fork to get more of the good stuff—the wheat. But for many years I identified as the bad stuff—the chaff. Maybe some of you think of yourselves that way too—as the chaff that is gotten rid of and burned; I didn’t feel worthy of God’s love or Jesus’ sacrifice for me. It has taken years of hearing that Jesus came to redeem the sinners and the lost that I could believe that he came for me. We hear every Advent and Christmas that Mary and Joseph were to name the child Jesus for he

would save his people from their sins. It was just hard for me to think of myself as one of those that Jesus came to save.

It has finally sunk in after being at many baptisms and performing some; that at our baptism we are adopted into God's family—that we are beloved sons and daughters; that we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ—forever! It has finally sunk in that because God so loved all of us that he sent his one and only Son to become one of us, to die for us and to give us everlasting life, but I still need reminding every now and then because it's so easy to believe Satan when he says that we aren't worthy of God's love—that we are the chaff.

For that reason Isaiah 43:1-7 has been a favorite of mine, but it had slipped from my mind until this summer when Dorothy had it as one of the Bible readings for her funeral. It was also brought to mind during the Women's Bible study on Isaiah. I also learned during text study that this is the only time in the Bible that God says, "I love you" to humanity.

Listen to it again, "But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. 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. 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. Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in

exchange for your life. Do not fear, 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 them up,' and to the south, 'Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.'”

Before Jesus did anything God told him that he was beloved and well pleased with him. At his baptism Jesus received the Holy Spirit and the strength to begin and complete his ministry—even though it would lead him to the cross. At our baptisms we are joined to God’s family as beloved sons and daughters before we have done anything. At our baptisms we are given the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. At our baptisms we too are joined into Christ’s ministry. Strengthened with God’s love and the power of the Holy Spirit—what will we do to bring God’s kingdom into the world?