



## Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

January 6, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT  
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces**



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

The Our Daily Bread devotion I share with you today was a specific New Year's Eve meditation. Still, I find that the message it conveys has been valid for all of our days in 2021, and beyond. The Scripture it is based on is one of my favorite encouragements of the Bible: Isaiah 43:1-7. **"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."** (verse 1)

In my experience, belonging is one of our deepest desire and yearning. We all need a sense of being loved and appreciated. Several mental health problems derive from harsh treatment from those closest to us; from the ones we are supposed to receive support and inspiration. It can cause deep scars if we don't feel this backing, especially if this lack of patronage happens during our vulnerable childhood.

How encouraging it is then to hear from the King of the Universe stating: **"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; ... you are mine."** (verse 1) Although we may know that this message of the Almighty was originally told to the Israelites: **"... he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel ..."** (verse 1) we are also assured that with the birth and sacrifice of Jesus the Christ this 'status' of being God's beloved children was extended to *"all people"* of this globe. God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Him: **"... all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** (Genesis 12:3)

Apostle Paul - who was an Israelite and a Pharisee; who felt anguish for his own people – stated this to the Romans: **"... it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. ... As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them 'my people' who are not my people;'"** (Romans 9:8; 21) He also wrote: **"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ... And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"** (Romans 8:14-15)

As we approach the still 'uncharted waters' of 2021; as we experience economic, political challenges around us, and feel the "COVID fatigue" in us or in our environment, we are encouraged to call the Almighty God **"Our Father"**. We receive assurance that we don't have to live our lives in fear, or act out of fear, because we belong to the Holy One through the Beloved Son.

Let us hear the inspiration that whatever this year may bring we are not alone in it. As the writer of this devotion put it: *"Whatever we face, He's with us—and He has the power to calm the waves."*

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



## Uncharted Waters

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.*

Isaiah 43:2

### READ ISAIAH 43:1-7

The ball drops in New York's Times Square. The crowd counts down to Big Ben chiming. Sydney Harbor erupts in fireworks. However, your city marks it, there's something exciting about welcoming in a new year and the fresh start it brings. On New Year's Day we push out into new waters. What friendships and opportunities might we find?

For all its excitement, though, a new year can be unsettling. None of us knows the future or what storms it may hold. Many New Year's traditions reflect this: Fireworks were invented in China to supposedly ward off evil spirits and make a new season prosperous. And New Year's resolutions date back to the Babylonians who made vows to appease their gods. Such acts were an attempt to make an unknown future secure.

When they weren't making vows, the Babylonians were busy conquering people—including Israel. In time, God sent the enslaved Jews this message: "Do not fear . . . . When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isaiah 43:1-2). Later, Jesus said something similar when He and the disciples were caught sailing in a violent storm. "Why are you so afraid?" He told them before commanding the waters to be still (Matthew 8:23-27).

Today we push out from the shore into new, uncharted waters. Whatever we face, He's with us—and He has the power to calm the waves. – By **Sheridan Voysey**

### REFLECT & PRAY

**God, thank You that whatever this new year brings, You will be with me in it. Amen.**

What possibilities excite you as you look forward to a new year? What worries can you place in God's hands?

### SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out that the phrase "but now" (or "and now"), which launches Isaiah 43:1, is a repeating feature of this section of Isaiah's prophecy. It's also found in 44:1; 49:5; and 52:5. In a section that boldly promises God's rescue of the people of Israel, the phrase "but now" sets God's promised rescue in contrast to the discipline He's brought upon His people because of their chronic waywardness (see Isaiah 42). The vital thing to remember, however, is that God's acts of correction and rescue are both expressions of His love for His people. Though they'd rejected His love, He loved them to the point of disciplining them for their wrongful actions. Then He loved them enough to bring them home. – By **Bill Crowder**

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