

But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ³ For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead. ⁴ Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. ⁵ Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. ⁶ I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth ⁷ everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

In the name of Jesus Christ, dear fellow Christians, and especially you my young friends, who today publicly confess that you are followers of Jesus.

If sheep were left on their own, the sheep would have a lot to be afraid of. Sheep are not very strong. Not very smart. Not very fast. And so the sheep would have a lot to be afraid of if they were left on their own. But they are not left on their own. Sheep have a shepherd. The shepherd feeds them and protects the sheep from the wolves and watches the sheep so they don't wander off.

If we were left on our own. We would have a lot to be afraid of. The Bible says that we have an enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for something to devour. This enemy is bigger and faster and stronger than we are. Just like sheep we are prone to wander off and get ourselves into trouble. If we were left on our own, we would have a lot to be afraid of. But we're not left on our own. We have the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Our Good Shepherd cares for us and protects us, and goes after us when we wander off.

If we were left on our own we would have a lot to be afraid of, but today in his word God tells us **“Do not be afraid, for I am with you” (Isaiah 43:5)** Don't be afraid! Your Good Shepherd is with you! 1. He calls you by name. And 2. He makes you stand firm.

First, he calls you by name. Each one of you has a story. Each one of you is unique. Each one of you has a unique set of personality traits and a unique set of experiences. And that means that each one of you has a unique set of needs to be met and a unique sets of hurts to be healed.

Well today in his word God says, **“I have summoned you by name.”** And Jesus says that the Good Shepherd **“calls his own sheep by name.” (John 10:3)** Jesus has nine billion people in the world to keep track of but he knows your name.

Jesus once told a parable about a lost sheep. He said if you have a hundred sheep and lose one of them, don't you leave the 99 and go look for the one lost sheep? And I've always wondered, how

does the shepherd know if he has lost just one sheep? If you are looking at a big group of sheep how do you know if there are 99 or if there are 100? The only way to know is to count each one.

One of the children's Bibles I read to Luke tells the story of the lost sheep and it says, "Every night the shepherd counted the sheep: '96, 97, 98, 99 ...' Hmmm. There's one sheep missing! The Shepherd counted again 96, 97, 98, 99 ..." That's how much your Good Shepherd loves you. If you're number 100 he's going to come after you until he finds you. He loved you so much that he came down from heaven to find you. He loves you so much that he paid the price for you to go to heaven and that price was his own precious blood. He says that he has done all of this for you **"you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you."** (Isaiah 43:4) So don't be afraid! Your Good Shepherd is with you! And he calls you by name. Your Good Shepherd also makes you stand firm.

Isaiah says, **"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."** (Isaiah 43:2) Has it ever happened to you that you visit Lake Michigan or some other lake and you walk out into the water and wave comes up and knocks you right over!

Well there are going to be lots of waves in your life of faith. Some of them are going to be hard crashing waves like a traumatic event. Other waves are going to be more subtle. Jesus once talked about people who let worries, riches and pleasures cause them to fall away from the faith. Don't let all the other things in your life crowd out Jesus. Don't let all the other things in your life be like waves that steadily cause you to drift further and further away from Jesus.

The New Testament contains letters written by Christian pastors to their congregations. Ten of those letters (ten!) contain the same two letter phrase: "stand firm." Type the phrase "stand firm" into Bible Gateway on your chrome book and you find that 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, James and 1 Peter all say "stand firm." It was obviously important to pastors like Paul and Peter and James that their church members *stand firm* in the faith. That they do not fall away from coming to worship. And that's important to your pastors too. Today you are being *confirmed*. Your pastors want you to *stand firm*. Because there's another thing it says in the New Testament: "He who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13): And that's what's most important to us pastors: that you be saved in the end.

There will be a lot of waves in life that try to knock you over. But don't be afraid! Your Good Shepherd is with you. And he will make you stand firm. God says: **"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."** (Isaiah 43:2) Stay close to Jesus through word and sacrament and no wave of life will ever knock you over.

And of course we can't do that by our own power. Remember we are just sheep helpless on our own. But our Good Shepherd is there to give us the power to stand firm. He's there to pick us up when we fall and forgive us in his grace. He's there to strengthen our faith when it weak. So stand firm in the Lord my young friends. And don't be afraid! Your Good Shepherd is with you. Amen.