

Lectionary readings: Isaiah 43: 1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8: 14-17; Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 43:** This is a lovely passage where God is calling us into an intimate relationship with Himself. God says to us, *'Don't be afraid. I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.'* God calls each of us by name. Later on He says, *'You are precious to me. You are honoured, and I love you.'* This is the message God wants us to hear - He loves us. We are precious to Him. We will all have hard times to go through as we journey through life. But God says, *'When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned....Do not be afraid, for I am with you.'* What wonderful reassurance to know that God loves us and that, whatever we go through, He is with us. May we be aware of His presence and open ourselves up to Him.
- **Psalm 29:** Here are some excerpts from this Psalm from 'Psalms for Praying' which I find puts the Psalms into contemporary language and thought-forms. *'Give praise to the Beloved ... sing of Love's glory and strength. Exalt the glory of Love's Name. Adore the Beloved in holy splendour The voice of Love is powerful The voice of the Beloved breaks the bonds of oppression, shatters the chains of injustice. Love invites all to the dance of freedom, to sing the Beloved's song of truth Love uproots fear in every open heart The Beloved lives in our hearts. Love dwells with us*

forever. May Love give strength to all people. May Love bless all nations with peace.'

- **Acts 8:** This is a strange passage but to me it speaks of God's all-inclusive love, no one excluded. If we do exclude people, then I believe we are going against God's loving concern and unconditional love for all. Up to this time the church had been limited to Jews. Now it was opened up to Samaritans. It's the Holy Spirit who enables us to love like Jesus and who makes us into a loving, welcoming community.
- **Luke 3:** John the Baptist was well aware of his mission being a preparation for Jesus who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire, the fire of the Spirit burning up the dross in us, cleansing and purifying us. Then we have the account of Jesus' baptism by John when he receives the Holy Spirit and God confirms His call: *'You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you.'* We, too, need to hear God say to us, *'You are my beloved one; I am fully pleased with you.'* If we truly believed that and lived as God's beloved, then not only would we be changed, but we would find others changed too, for we would see them also as God's beloved and treat them as we would Christ Himself.

A prayer

Loving God, you have chosen us and called us your beloved ones so that we might reveal your love in the world. We find it difficult to believe that you can love us with an unconditional love, but we respond by giving ourselves in love to you, opening ourselves to your Spirit within us and choosing the way of Love, which is the way of Christ. So help us this week to see others as your beloved too and to let love flow unceasingly from us. Amen.