

**Sunday, January 13, 2019 – The Baptism of Our Lord  
“He Only Has Eyes For You”**

Isaiah 43: 1-7

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Text/Application

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

It's incredible the way we can manipulate visual images these days. Professional photographers have been airbrushing photos for years, from photoshoots to wedding pictures. In real time, and in many cases by default, even the basic camera on your phone will adjust for light conditions, skin tone. Instagram filters help you look artistic and Snapchat filters can provide laughs for distorted funhouse mirror effects or animal faces. Google Pixel now has a feature where if you have your camera set for motion photos (where your camera takes several quick shots as you press your finger on the screen to take the shot) it will automatically recommend fixes for when you close your eyes, or if your kid is squirming and looks like a blur in most of the shots – the software will dice and splice the best parts of the many pictures it took to put together and then recommend one great shot for you to save.

In Isaiah 42, the section right before our Old Testament text this morning Isaiah holds up the mirror of God's law for the people of Israel. Their many great sins turned them into the easiest of targets for Israel's enemies Assyria and Babylon to plunder. It's not a pretty snapshot. As God's anger comes like a burning fire the people didn't understand why fire and battle were waging all around them and as often happens didn't take the lesson to heart. For two hundred years we get picture after picture as first Assyria and then Babylon chipped away, a little at a time. Cities and territories were ceded one by one while the kings went on leading the people into child sacrifice and worshipping false gods on hilltops around asherah poles. The rich exploited the poor while going through the motions in their religiosity. Finally God's presence left His earthly dwelling place in the temple and the vice tightened around Jerusalem itself before it was toppled and destroyed in 586BC. And while all this was going on some despaired at the

hideous reflection, others airbrushed away the problems in their minds' eye but all were left with an image that is ultimately distorted.

However, we have no right understanding of the end of Isaiah 42 without our text today from Isaiah 43. Don't mistake God's anger against sin or His judgment against it as the defining truth about who we are. God's may have up and left Jerusalem, letting them experience the consequences of their sin but He never abandoned His promise. I'm talking about the promises made to Abraham – to be the father of many nations, including a nation to last forever. The promise made to David, too – of a kingdom that will have no end. Later in this little section of Isaiah we'll hear the Suffering Servant king described in detail, one stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, on whom God lays the iniquity of us all.

Yes, all of us – from ancient Israel to you and me today, from the ancient sins that led to the destruction of Jerusalem to the sins of today that bring their own burning fires and warfare and floodwaters up to our necks.

Do you despair over your sins? Do you see them reflected back at you, ugly and gruesome and believe that they permanently define you? Do you airbrush your sins? Do you filter them to make them justifiable, excusable, to minimize them and pretend like they aren't there?

I remember when I was seven years old, looking in the mirror and thinking that a few strands of hair over my forehead were a little long and uneven. So I went to the kitchen, took a pair of sharp scissors (kids, don't try this at home), went back to the bathroom mirror, yanked on a section of the front of my hair and started snipping away at the offending out of place strand of hair. I immediately knew I'd taken WAY too much off so I tried the oldest trick in the book – the combover. But I could fool neither the mirror nor my parents. It took a barber's steady hand to save the day and make me presentable. When I walked out of the barber's chair, the offense was removed and I looked good.

Because of the one who has taken the iniquity of us all the ugliness that reflects back at you is no longer the truth. The fires that threaten to consume will not burn you and the rising waters will not drown you because the Lord, your God saves you. You are precious in His eyes. Oh, I know you see things you don't want to see and may desperately try to smooth away – with just the right filter, we could fix this image, after all. I know you are horrified at consequences that threaten to burn you up or drown you. I know you may feel driven toward despair.

God says in Isaiah 43, "You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you." No matter what the mirror you see says to you it's what God says about you that is true and that matters. How much is something worth? Whatever someone is willing to pay for it. And second, the past owner can have an effect. A pair of stinky, sweaty, beaten up shoes sold for \$4,000 – they were game worn by Michael Jordan. A leather jacket sold for \$1.8 million – it was worn by Michael Jackson in the Thriller video. So too a dress sold for over \$5 million – it was the famous Marilyn Monroe dress. Our value is based both on who owns us and what someone is willing to pay for us. And that's very good news for you and me because you belong to our Father God who paid with the life of His very own Son for you. Distortions, be gone – friend, you are precious in God's sight – He only has eyes for you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.