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Baptism-Madeline Rose Rickard

Recently I was traveling to a conference on the west coast,
and I was going through the security
search at the airport.

I took off my shoes...
emptied my pockets of change and my
cell phone,
had my luggage searched.

Put my laptop computer on the x-ray belt and walked through the metal detector.

While I was doing this, all of a sudden, one of the security inspectors at another checkpoint shouted "Stop!" in a loud voice.

What had happened was that a man at the checkpoint had simply forgotten to take the change out of his pockets and had set off one of the metal detectors.

Innocently unaware that he had done this, he kept on walking toward his gate.

It was nothing really. No big deal.

But when the inspector shouted "Stop!" everybody in the whole area froze,
and the airport grew deathly silent.
You could almost touch the fear in
the air.

As I walked to my plane, I thought...
*"You know, I think the old world where
we thought we were safe and secure is
gone forever.*

*What happened back there reminds me
That we don't know what's going to
happen next in the world, and that can be
very unsettling."*

How many of us who think of ourselves as people of faith could say the same thing?

"I don't know what's going to happen next in the world, and it makes me afraid."

It's one thing to trust God,
to feel close to God,
to feel God caring for us when life
seems stable, secure, and safe...

But what happens in those times when the

old world...

where we thought we were safe
and secure dies...
and the winds blow and
the world shakes and
fearful change and terror seems
to be at every hand?
What happens to our faith then?

Indeed, the greatest challenges to faith come in those moments when the world shifts on its axis and, the seas roar with fearful change.

The great historian Eric Hobsbawm remembers when his safe and secure world became a world of terror.

He grew up as a Jewish orphan in Berlin.

On a cold January day in 1933 when he was only 15 years old, he was walking his little sister home from school...

when he saw at a newsstand a
headline bearing frightening news
that would change his life,
change the life of all Jews,
change the life of the
whole world.

"Adolph Hitler Appointed Chancellor of Germany," the headline read.

Later in his life, Hobsbawm reflected on that moment and said...

"it was as if "we were on the Titanic and everyone knew it was going to hit the iceberg."

As Europe hurtled out of control toward World War II, the old world was violently ripped apart, and the new and uncertain world was born.

Hobsbawm said that it was difficult to describe "what it meant to live in a world that was simply not expected to last."

It was like living, he said, "between a dead past and a future not yet born."

That was exactly the situation of the Jews in the Bible after Babylon conquered them.

They were between a dead past and a future not yet born. Their old world had died.

What had happened was that the world's great super power, Babylon,

had marched on their home, the city of
Jerusalem,

crushed it, and left it in ruins.

Many Jews were taken back to Babylon as war prisoners where they "sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept."

They felt like they were pawns in a game they could not control.

And, then, just when it was hard to believe that things could get any worse, they did.

A new power--Persia--arose in the East and was rattling its swords against Babylon.

Now, once again, the Jews were in harm's way in the middle of a war zone.

Babylon was sure to be destroyed.

War fears swept the city.

What would become of the weak and
frightened little colony of Jews?

The wheels of history were about to roll over them again, and they were living in a world not expected to last,
between a dead past and a future not yet
born.

And they were afraid.

And, then, it is right at this most fearful moment that there comes this amazing, almost
unbelievable word from the prophet Isaiah to the Jewish people,

*"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
speak tenderly to Jerusalem....
do not be afraid, I will be with you."*

Christians recognize that word, of course.

In fact, if I had to put the Gospel of Jesus Christ into one phrase, I think it might be,

"Do not be afraid."

It is what the angels said to the shepherds in Bethlehem when Jesus was born:

"Do not be afraid."

It is the first word the angel spoke on Easter morning:

"Do not be afraid."

It is what the risen Christ said to his disciples:

"Do not be afraid. I am with you always."

But it's one thing to say it, and it's another thing to believe it.

The television news shows and the newspapers show us in graphic detail why we should INDEED be afraid!

And when a security inspector in a crowded airport shouts, "Stop!"
people freeze with fear.

The fact of the matter is, we are afraid!

When we think about it, our fear is not just about the stock market or the possibility of violence in the streets.

Those are just symptoms of a deeper fear...
that we are frail and temporary creatures,
set in an uncertain space.

And that is why the prophet Isaiah can say with great confidence,
'Do not be afraid,' says the Lord,"

Because Isaiah knew that the Lord who spoke those words is not some distant deity,
some impersonal force loose in the
universe,
a god pulling the strings of history.

God is more like a mother who listens in the night for the cries of her children. "
'Do not be afraid,' says the Lord.
'I created you. I formed you.
I have redeemed you.
I have called you by name.
You are mine.'"

The God of Israel, the God whose story is told in this scripture, always calls us by name:
Adam, Eve, Abraham, Sarah, Moses,
Samuel, Mary.

This is the God we see in the face of Jesus Christ.
The God who walks along the shore and
calls by name:
"Peter, Andrew, John,...follow me."

This is the God who knows your name,
who knows the number of the hairs on
your head,
the God who remembers you and
does not forget you,
the God who, even when the
winds howl and the seas roar, listens for your voice,
knows your cry, and
says to each of us,
*"Do not be afraid. I know you.
I have called you by name.
I am coming to help you.
You are mine."*

Today we have the joy of baptizing Madeline Rose.

As I pour the water of baptism on her head I will say the words,

*"I baptize you, Madeline, in the name of
the Father and the Son and the Holy
Spirit."*

Have you ever noticed how important names are in baptism?

In her baptism, we called Madeline by name.
And we believe that God called Madeline by
name too,
and that her name will be joined
forever to God's name,
just as all who are baptized
have their names called,
have their names joined
forever to God's name.

Now the truth of the matter is that none of us knows what Madeline's life will hold in the future.

We pray that her life will be full of joy and health and peace,

but we also know that, because she is a
human being,
she will also face pain and loss and
sorrow.

We know, as the prophet Isaiah knew,
that faith does not protect us from the
realities of life.

But we also know that God knows Madeline's name,
that God created her, formed her,
redeemed her, and calls her by name.

God will never forget her,
will never leave her alone,
will come to her and will be with her
at every turn.

So, as Isaiah tells us, God says to her and says to you and to me too:

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

*When you pass through the rivers,
they shall not overwhelm you.*

*When you walk through the fire,
the flame shall not consume you.*

I have called you by name, and you are mine.

It is indeed a hard and dangerous world.

It would be a lie to say that we know when terror may strike again.

God does not promise to lift us out of the
surging waters of life.

What God does say is that we will not be alone.

When all hell breaks loose around us,
 there is God holding our hand,
 calling us by name.

Amen.