

*But now says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flames shall not consume you.'* Isaiah 43:1-2.

One of the key things to hold in our minds as we read Isaiah is that it comes from a time of national catastrophe. The exile was crushing and horrifying not simply in the way that war always is for prisoners and refugees, but because it called into question their identity as a chosen people. Isaiah had proclaimed that God would lead them home - it will be quite a journey, across rivers and difficult terrain, but the promise is that they will return home in God's strength, not their own. Again and again the message, not just of Isaiah and the prophets but of the whole of Holy Scripture is, 'Don't be afraid, God is with you.'

Let that message sink deep into our bones today. For many of us the journey is hard at the moment; we are fearful of jobs, of sickness, of being apart from loved ones. Perhaps take a little time to read all of Isaiah 43 and remember that we are not travelling alone or in our own strength.