

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**December 26, 2010**

**I Will Be With You**

Isaiah 43:1-7, 11-12

**Key verse:** “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you” (Isaiah 43:2).

Harvard professor of psychology Daniel Gilbert recently interpreted the results of a national study, the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. Gilbert says that the study showed “that Americans are smiling less and worrying more than they were a year ago, that happiness is down and sadness is up, that we are getting less sleep and smoking more cigarettes, that depression is on the rise.”

Gilbert observed that lack of money is not the real problem. The real problem is *uncertainty*. Americans, in this period of economic uncertainty, are plagued by questions like: Will I have a job next month? Can I ever afford to retire? What does the future hold for me and my family?

The professor cited an experiment in which one group of participants was told they would receive a severe shock 20 times. Researchers told a second group that they would be shocked with three strong shocks and 17 milder shocks, but they would not know when the stronger shocks would come. The results? The second group evidenced the greatest discomfort—they sweated more and had faster heart rates than the first group. *Uncertainty* caused their discomfort.

Gilbert summarized: “An uncertain future leaves us stranded in an unhappy present with nothing to do but wait.... Our national gloom is real enough, but it isn’t a matter of insufficient funds. It’s a matter of insufficient certainty.”

To the Jewish people living in the unhappy uncertainty of Babylonian exile, God sent good news! That good news, according to Isaiah 43:1-7, 11-12, could be summarized like this:

God reminded Israel that He was the one who had “created” and “formed” them, as a nation and as a people (v. 1a). God said to Israel “Do not fear” because “you are mine” (v. 1b). God also renewed His promise to be with them and to deliver them—“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 flame shall not consume you” (v. 2).

In verses 5-7, God promised that He would deliver from exile the Jewish people and their descendants. And verses 11-12 state God's intention that His work on behalf of the exiles would be proof to others of God's saving power.

During this uncertain time in our own nation, we who through faith in Christ have become heirs of God's promises to Israel need to hear the promise of God through Isaiah.

Two statements, in particular, speak to me: "I will be with you" (v. 2) and "you are mine" (v. 1).

"I will be with you." During this Christmas season, we are reminded that over 2000 years ago God spoke to a young woman named Mary. God told Mary that she would give birth to a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. And God told Mary that the child would be known as "Emmanuel," which means *God with us*.

In these days of economic uncertainty, we can be sure that God is with us. And we can claim the promise of Isaiah 43:2—"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."

"You are mine." As children of God, we are not exempt from difficult and uncertain times. But knowing who we are—and *whose* we are—can make all the difference.

In the Disney animated film, *Toy Story*, Woody the toy cowboy gives Buzz Lightyear the toy astronaut some shocking news. Woody tells Buzz that he is not really a superhero, only a toy action figure.

Buzz is devastated by this news. At one point, he hangs his head dejectedly and mutters, "I'm just a stupid, little, insignificant toy."

Later, Woody the cowboy reminds Buzz of the boy who loves and owns them both: "You must not be thinking clearly. Look, over in that house, there's a kid who thinks you're the greatest, and it's not because you're a space ranger; it's because you're his."

Just then, Buzz lifts his foot and sees a name written on the bottom of his shoe. Written there in permanent black ink is the name of the little boy to whom Buzz belongs. Reminded of who he is and *whose* he is, Buzz Lightyear grins with joy and with a new sense of identity and purpose.

Yes, these are uncertain times. But if you know Jesus Christ as your savior and God as your Father, you can face these times claiming the certainty of God's promise:

"Do not fear.... 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 flame shall not consume you."

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