

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, January 12, 2025

**"To Belong to God"**

## *Young at Heart Message*

Who remembers learning how to ride a bicycle?

I remember my journey toward learning to ride a bicycle like it was yesterday because it was an incredibly important experience for me.

I wanted to learn how to ride a bike so badly because I idolized my Dad, and he knew how to ride a bike.

He promised that once I learned to ride, we could ride together, and we could ride around town for longer rides.

I was also secretly motivated to learn to ride because I desperately wanted to be able to ride my bike to school by myself.

I was young – probably 4 years old – when I started begging my Dad to teach me. I wanted so badly to “grow up” and ride a “big girl bike.”

As most kids do, I started learning to ride with training wheels.

The training wheels gave a sense of security and safety – if I started to tip a little to one side or the other, they would catch me and keep me from falling.

However, because I was in such a hurry to ride a “big girl bike,” I didn't want to use the training wheels for very long before I begged to have them taken off.

For a few rides, my Dad would hold onto the seat of the bike to keep me from falling over until I got up enough speed to ride.

But I wasn't quite steady enough on the bike, so I fell quite a few times.

My Dad couldn't be there all the time with me, so when I would play outside, I would grab my bike and practice in the grass.

This was pretty smart, if I do say so myself, because when I inevitably fell, it didn't hurt.

You'll be happy to know that by the time I was about 5, I was riding a bike without any assistance.

The only problem I ever had after that was when my shoelaces would get caught up in the pedals, and I couldn't pedal backward because at that time, pedaling backwards hit the breaks.

But I fixed that problem by making sure I fell onto the grassy curb when it happened.

(I also could have tucked my laces in my shoes, but we won't mention that!)

Much like learning to ride a bike, there are times in life when we might face challenges or uncertainty that require a little extra support.

In those times, God is there for and with us, supporting us, guiding us, and helping us along.

Much like the training wheels, or my Dad holding onto the seat of my bike, or even the softer grass to land on, God is right there with us.

God can't prevent us from falling, but God can be with us as we do.

Isaiah 43 has so many useful nuggets of wisdom:

Do not fear, 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 flame shall not consume you.

What if instead, we imagined Isaiah to say something like this:

“Do not fear! I have called you by name and you are mine.  
When you desperately want to learn to ride a bike, I will be with you. And when  
you outgrow your training wheels, falling shall not overwhelm you; when you do  
fall, you shall not be hurt, and if you are, I will guide you to the soft grass so you  
can have a safe landing. Do not fear, for I am with you.”

God isn't saying that life won't throw us challenges! But, when we are in the  
midst of those challenges, God asks us not to be afraid and to trust that God is  
with us through it all.

God is in the metaphorical training wheels of life, and God is there when we get  
brave enough to remove those training wheels and try things on our own.

God is there when we inevitably fall, and God is there when we get back up and try again!

### ***The Message***

Now, I love the passage we read from Isaiah today. It might be one of my favorite passages in the entire Bible.

I love the idea of God calling me by name and reminding that I belong to God.

I love that this passage reminds me that through all of the challenges of life, God is right there with me. I also love that God so explicitly says that I am loved.

I love the Isaiah passage, and I would love to preach only on that scripture today.

But we hear an important passage from the Gospel of Luke today, too, and I think it would be helpful to talk about how these two scriptures work together.

In the Gospel of Luke, we heard two connected but distinct stories.

First, we heard about John the Baptizer, baptizing people who wonder if *he* is the Messiah.

And John, instead of relishing in his potential 15-minutes of fame, humbly tells people that while he *is* baptizing them, someone more powerful than he is coming – someone who is so powerful that he is not even worthy to undo the straps of his sandals.

John doesn't allow himself to be overwhelmed by the people who seem to be idolizing him.

Instead, he makes way for Jesus – the one he believes is the true Messiah.

Secondly, we read that John baptizes the people, but he also baptizes Jesus.

This is a momentous occasion in itself, but then the heavens are opened and the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove.

Everyone hears a voice from heaven that says "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Talk about the excitement of God calling you by name!

I feel warm and fuzzy inside when I read Isaiah, but I can only imagine how Jesus would feel when this voice from heaven calls him by name, declaring him God's Son!

Jesus of course is humble, but he is also fully human. It had to have felt good to have such a strong declaration made in front of so many people.

But it also validated John's claims that Jesus was the Messiah, and of course it was one of many more miracles that helped people understand who Jesus was.

The wonderful thing about reading the Isaiah passage and the Luke passage together is that it gives even more power to the Isaiah passage because Jesus demonstrates for us what it means for God to call us by name.

We might not each get a voice from heaven declaring us God's offspring, but we *do* each belong to God, and that is a wonderful gift.

Throughout the Gospels we see examples of God calling Jesus by name and using Jesus to do good in the world.

But Isaiah tells us that we are also called by name.

We lead by example, and we too belong to God.

We are each created with our own unique gifts which God calls us to use to make this world a better place.

It can be scary to think about using our gifts and talents in new or different ways.

But, much like learning to ride a bike, God is right there with us.

In our training wheels, in another person holding us steady as we get up the courage to do it on our own, and in a soft place to land when we fall, God is there.

We belong to God, and that is a wonderful and beautiful thing.

When we pass through the waters, God will be with us, and through the rivers, we shall not be overwhelmed. When we walk through fire, the flame shall not consume us.

We are loved. We are cared for. We are surrounded by God's embrace.

We are called by name, and we belong to God.

Let that Good News follow us wherever we go. Amen.

Let us pray:

God of safety and security, thank you for being our training wheels, our support, and our soft place to land. Even in the busyness of life, through the challenges and storms, you ride with us, placing a hand on us to steady us, and carrying us when life becomes too much for us to bear on our own. Belonging to You is a blessing, and we are overwhelmed with gratitude for your love. In your Holy name we pray. Amen.