

What's next? A little bit of cake, maybe some egg-bake? Then what? A party, some family and friends. A short week of school, a picnic. Then what? What's next? Summer-time. No school. No homework. Some vacation. Sounds good, doesn't it? Resting, relaxing, hanging out.

But what do you know? What comes next isn't all comfy and cozy, is it? And I'm not just talking summertime chores. What's next? For some of you, high school; for others a new move, a new school. New people, new places; some exciting, some maybe scary. But what do you know? You know what your God says: **“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** You know what your God says. And you know what your God can do. Like Israel out of Egypt, through the Red Sea - your God gets his people out of trouble. Like David before Goliath, like Daniel in the lions' den - your God makes his people strong and brave. Like that lamb in Jesus' hand - your God holds his people safe.

But I don't always feel safe, strong, or brave. Sometimes I feel afraid. And that's not the worst of it. When God says those nice things, sometimes I've wondered: “How do I know God means me?” I don't feel him. I don't hear him. What I do feel, what I do hear is: “Look what you've done! How could you? Why did you? Why can't you get it right?” I do things that make people angry; I do things that must make God angry. I do things, I think things that make me feel guilty and yucky; I do things, I think things that must make God see me as guilty and yucky. So why would God get me out of my trouble? Why would God make me strong and brave? Why would God hold me safe? Ever been there? Here's why - because God has chosen you to be his; he's called you to be his; and in baptism he's put his name on you as his. “But look what I've done, look what I think, look at the trouble I cause, the trouble I get myself into.” No. Look to Jesus. Look at what he's done. He came into our trouble and called it “his.” He took on our sin and guilt, and called it “his.” He took on God's anger, God's punishment - the anger and punishment we had coming - and he called it “his.” He traded

with us. He gave his life and called it yours. He gave his death and called it yours. He gave his holiness, his love, his place with God, and he calls it yours.

Now when you get yourself into trouble, instead of thinking: “God must be against me,” .... Now when you feel guilty and yucky, instead of thinking “God couldn’t love me,” .... Now, with Jesus we get to pray: “God, have mercy on me a sinner. God, get me out of this mess, this mess called me. God, help me.” With Jesus, God does. With Jesus, God says to you: “I forgive you. With Jesus, I love you. With Jesus, you get to move on from your guilt, your yuck; with Jesus, you get to get past your fears.” With Jesus, you have God for you: **“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

Why? For what? Well, what’s next? Let me warn you, what’s next isn’t just cake and egg-bake. What’s next isn’t just resting, relaxing, hanging out. And what’s next isn’t just new people and new places, a little bit scary. What’s next is ....

Have any of you seen the new Avengers movie - *Endgame*? I haven’t seen it. Stephanie tells me that if I were to see it, I’d be clueless. Which I think is better than her telling me that I am clueless. But that’s neither here nor there. What’s the movie about? A battle between good and evil, life and death. A battle of epic proportions. A battle of cosmic significance. A battle for the life and soul of the universe. That’s what we have in Isaiah 41. God isn’t promising the easy life - resting, relaxing, hanging out. And he’s promising more than help with new people and places. In this year’s theme verse, God is setting us up, getting us ready for the battle between good and evil, life and death; he’s getting us ready to battle for the life and soul of the universe.

Do you know where you fit into that battle? You are God’s special agent servants, like Jesus is God’s special agent servant. Just like God had something special for Jesus to do, God has something special for you to do. God doesn’t say “Do not fear” just so you can rest, relax, and hang out, just

so you can do your thing. No, God says “do not fear,” so you can be brave to do his thing. God doesn’t educate you - abc, 123, reading, writing, ‘rithmetic - just so you can be smart and get ahead in the world. No, God educates you so you can be smart to do his thing. And when God chose you and called you, when God gives you his promise, he didn’t and he doesn’t do all that just so you can feel good about yourselves. No, God has chosen you, called you, and given you his promise, to set you up to be strong to do his thing.

Like Jesus. When God set Jesus up as his special agent servant, Jesus didn’t pull back: “Do I have to?” No, Jesus saw what he could do for us - he saw you forgiven, saved, alive with God. At the same time, Jesus saw what God would do for him - how God would make him strong and hold him safe. So with you, with God, in his heart, Jesus gave himself over to live God’s plan and promise. He did what God gave him to do; he did what we need for life with God, as God’s special agent servant.

So now what? What’s next? You get to find a way to live, not just for yourself, but for God. How? We live in a world of hurt, don’t we? As God’s special agent servants, you get to find a way to care for people, to share the heart and love of God with people. We live in a world of temptation with evil and injustice all around us. As God’s special agent servants, you get to find a way to fight temptation, to put evil in its place, to undo evil. Yes, as God’s special agent servants, you are on a mission from God to do the things of God. Does that sound daunting? You have his promise: **“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”** As God’s special agent servants, you get to bring God’s blessing, you get to be God’s blessing. Amen.