

Lenten Message
From
Rev. Marilyn Spurrell
Eastern Sunrise District Superintendent
to the people of the
Dakotas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Here these words from **Isaiah 43** "*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! The waters shall not overwhelm you and the flame shall not consume you. I am the Lord your God.*"

It was a bitterly cold night in January 2010. That night flames broke through the roof of the Humboldt United Methodist Church. The fire spread quickly through that wood framed building. Even though firefighters from five different fire departments responded, they lost the fight. Before long that church building had been totally destroyed, fully engulfed in flames. It was not long. All that could be done was to watch, wait and remember. Even the next day the remains of that church building smoldered. A group of us gathered members from the congregation, pastors from the surrounding area. That afternoon we claimed God's promise. Even though flames had destroyed the church building the congregation would not be consumed. As I said the blessing we received a gift. A young man, a member of the congregation, who had been one of the firefighters who fought the fight, brought to Pastor Gary Johnson the chalice. The chalice was the one the congregation regularly used for communion. It was covered with dirt, suit, with ashes. It became a symbol for us of God's promise. Even though flames had destroyed a building, God's people would not be consumed.

There are those of us who during these late winter weeks, as we anticipate spring, need to remember the other part of the verse from *Isaiah 43*. The promise says that rising waters, flooding rivers will not consume and will not overwhelm. In these days between a winter that has already lasted too long, a winter that has been far too cold, far too

much snow, is this season we call flooding, that stands between us and the promise of spring. I wonder for those us who wait, who feel our vulnerability, that is part of so much that we cannot control. We don't know how fast the spring thaw will occur. We do not know how much more precipitation will fall or what form the participation will come in. We do not know how fast or when the rivers will overflow or the ground will be covered with water. We need to remember God's promise, that though the waters may rise, the rivers may rise, we will not be overwhelmed.

On Easter morning the people of the Humboldt United Methodist Church hope to worship in their new church building. What is wonderful about their story is that they have not only built a new church building they have grown spiritually, and they have grown numerically.

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It is my hope and my prayer that we the people of the Dakotas Conference who are going to experience the power and the vulnerability that comes with spring flooding. We will be as faithful as the people of the Humboldt United Methodist Church, who have lived into God's promise. Flames may destroy buildings but they will not consume us. May we live into God's promise that the rivers may rise, the waters may rise, we will not be overcome. Amen

