

The GATHERING

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you, I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west"

—Isaiah 43:5-7

I AM With You: A Promise for the Scattered



Photo: Unsplash

Isaiah 43:5 opens with a steadying promise: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you." In a season when so many families ache from separation – parents detained in ICE facilities, children lying awake unsure what tomorrow will bring – these words arrive not as simple comfort but as sacred presence. They do not erase the weight of deportation or the grief surrounding an empty chair. But they speak into the fracture with a truth that refuses to be extinguished: even here, even now, God draws near.

As I linger with these verses, I hear echoes of God's self-disclosure in Exodus: "I AM WHO I AM." The one who is Being itself – Presence, that

cannot be confined by borders or contained by walls. When Isaiah says, "I am with you," it is this same I AM revealing a nearness that accompanies families in their waiting, their longing, their fear. This is not thin reassurance; it is a fierce, steady love that honors lament while refusing to abandon the possibility of restoration.

"I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west..." These words reach into the deep longing I've witnessed in pastoral moments: the whispered prayer of a mother separated from her son, the child clutching a photograph of a father he cannot embrace, the quiet sigh at a family table where someone is missing. God's promise to gather in not only geographical – it is relational, dignifying, and tender. It speaks to the holy desire woven into every human heart: to be reunited, seen, held.

This is the pulse of Advent. Mary and Joseph knew displacement, pressed by imperial decree to travel far from home, then fleeing with their newborn as refugees. The shepherds gathered in darkness, drawn toward a light they could not yet name. Their stories remind us that God's gathering often begins in hidden places, in the shadows of systems that wound. And still, God moves. Still, God gathers.

In our communities, I have seen glimpses of this gathering presence: churches praying for those detained, meal trains forming for families left behind circles of support surrounding children whose loved ones are far away. These acts do not erase the pain, but they testify that God is at work even in places of fracture – knitting us to one another, expanding our sense of family, and teaching us to wait with compassion.

Isaiah's promise stretches across centuries and borders. It speaks to every family lighting candles for someone not yet home, every parent longing for reunion, every community refusing to forget those who are scattered. Advent dares us to believe in God's gathering love – a love that reaches east and west until all belong.

Prayer: God who gathers the scattered, draw near to every family separated this season. Heal what injustice has broken, cradle those who wait in fear, and lead us toward the day when all are safely gathered in Your love. Amen.

