

2019 NL2 WK14 Isaiah Advent 2 – comfort, prepare, preach
19-12-08 2nd Sunday of Advent – Isaiah 40:1-11

God's beloved people, grace and peace to you in the name of our crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ.....Amen.....

As I was dwelling in the words, "*Comfort, O comfort my people*" this week, images kept coming to mind. Like seeing two people huddled together, one with an arm across the shoulders of the other. I see tears in eyes and shoulders shaking. I detect whispered assurances and gentle noises. There are hugs and maybe even laughter....eventually.

And relief.... O the relief.... What comforts YOU most? What do you experience when you are in need of comfort, have received comfort, or have given comfort? Do you seek God more urgently? Do you share God more readily?

God calls to the prophet Isaiah, "*Comfort, O comfort my people...*" It's both a **promise** from God and a **calling**. The words **do** to us what they encourage us to share. This powerful word of God reaches across time and distance to uplift you – to comfort you in your sorrows, in your pain, in your disappointment, in your despair. To soothe you with gentle tones, like the soothing sounds of a cello, serenading your soul.

God calls through the prophet to the exiles in Babylon. To God's own people who over the years had been delivered from slavery in Egypt..., had been governed by judges and ruled by kings... and conquered and carried away by invading armies... finally deposited for 50 years in Babylon.

That relationship was a rocky one over those 700 years. Sometimes the people and God were right in step... but many times they weren't. So God sent prophets to call the kings back to faithfulness. But eventually the sins of the nation piled so high, and the people had strayed so far away from God, that the marauding Babylonians were the judgement God gave to a people who had no compassion..., no sense of justice..., and no inclination to worship and serve the Lord their God. So.... Another "Egypt-experience...."

Was it really judgement from God, or just a powerful army coming through? Doesn't really matter because the people saw the Babylonians as God's judgement against them. Until...,

Isaiah was sent.... To comfort.... To remind the people of God's faithfulness and to assure them that their time in exile was over. God had forgiven them and in God's forgiveness, they had received a double portion of grace to cover their sins.

In this Advent season, we celebrate to remind us that God comes to us in forgiveness and comfort to soothe our aching souls and minds. For almost a thousand years Christians have marked this time of late fall turning to winter as a time to rest in the comfort of the promise of God's coming and to prepare for it.

One early church leader taught that Christ comes in three ways: in the flesh in Bethlehem, in your hearts every day, and in glory at the end of time. So we

remember Bethlehem at Christmas, and we hope in the glory of the kingdom come..... but we live in the glory of God in our hearts every day!

So we **Prepare**....

That every-day-ness of God in your heart prepares you for life. That promise of “God with you” is meant to take you from worship on Sunday to sustain you on Monday and Wednesday and Saturday... The exiles had only known hardship and persecution so Isaiah came with this word from God – *“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”*

The image I see here is of a massive road construction project – think “Northern States in the summer.” Bulldozers and earth movers...., cement trucks and asphalt layers...., road graders.... steam rollers and dump trucks.... all going to work belching diesel smoke and revving engines – orange cones for as far as the eye can see leading the way out of captivity. [But really what would a highway in those days look like? Two lane camel traffic?]

No mountain too high, no valley too low because *“the uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain.”* (All week I’ve been hearing Marvin Gaye, Tammi Terrell, Diana Ross, and others – *Ain’t no mountain high enough*....)

And whatever the “*glory of the Lord*” is.... *“All people will see it together!”*
Most scholars agree that the glory of the Lord means “God’s presence” – that God

is with you. And I think that, too. Maybe even God as the driver of the lead bulldozer pushing everything out of the way to smooth out those rough places in your life.

Whatever wilderness time of life you find yourself in... whatever obstacles you face... God is with you to move through them. As the days grow shorter and the outside darkness creeps in, as the paths/highways in our lives grow difficult with pot-holes and landslides, God calls us to prepare, to be ready for the coming of Jesus which is God's greatest entry into this world and into your life. We see it together...

Preach....

And Isaiah calls to us to *cry out*! Like a trumpet piercing through all the background noise of this world and our lives – the clear sharp sound of one “*crying out*” – literally – preaching! Isaiah calls you to preach! To share the everlasting word of God.

You might be a little reluctant....., so was the prophet. When the voice commanded him to cry out....., the prophet's voice....., like a nasally oboe, immediately starts to object - - “What shall I preach? The people don't care! They all die like grass and fade like flowers!”

This is a good sign for you and me. “God loves a reluctant prophet.” I've said many times, “Never trust an eager prophet or a pastor with a pristine Bible!”

What do we preach to a people who is dying and doesn't care about God??

“Comfort, O comfort...” “You may feel like grass, but God keeps promises forever.”..... ~~“Comfort, O comfort...”~~—~~is our theme verse for this church year and is printed on our bulletin every week as a reminder!!~~

As ones whom God gathers here every week, we are comfort seekers – not that we are looking for an easy, lazy, life..... but that we seek the comfort of our Lord. There may be many reasons that you are here this morning, but chief among them would be comfort. To BE comforted. ~~How many of you came to be yelled at? To be made to feel ashamed?~~

~~——That may happen, and when it does it makes us love God's grace even more....., but we are here in need of God's comforting,~~ we face obstacles, we feel despair – our own and that of our neighbor, we look at the world and wonder, “What in the world is going on?!”

But I was recently reminded that, “We're made for this!” [we people of God] In the face of pain, suffering, and despair, God comes with comfort..., that's God's word and everlasting promise to you...., and your word to your neighbor and to a world who so desperately need to hear that oppression/ fear/ violence/ greed/ despair... don't have the last word.... God does..... And God comes in your hearts every day.... Even as we await that final coming of God's kingdom. Amen.....