

**THE COMFORT OF THE LORD**  
**Sermon for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent, 2020**  
**Isaiah 40:1-11**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the First Reading read before, Isaiah 40: 1-11: <sup>1</sup> **“Comfort, comfort My people!” says your God.** <sup>2</sup> **“Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce to it that its compulsory military service is over, that its iniquity has been paid for and that it has received a double equivalent from the hand of the LORD for all its sins!”**

<sup>3</sup> **A voice of someone calling out in the wilderness: “Prepare a road for the LORD! Make a smooth highway in the desert for our God!** <sup>4</sup> **Every valley must be raised up and every mountain and hill must be levelled! The uneven land must become a plain and the rugged ground must become a plain!** <sup>5</sup> **The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and every human being will see it together.” For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

<sup>6</sup> **A voice was saying: “Make an announcement!”**

He kept asking, **“What shall I announce?”**

**“All human beings are like grass and all their beauty is like a flower in the field.** <sup>7</sup> **Grass dries up and a flower withers. For a breath from the LORD blows on it. Certainly, the people are grass!** <sup>8</sup> **Grass dries up and a flower withers, but the Word of our God will endure for ever.”**

<sup>9</sup> **O Zion, you who bring good news, go up on a high mountain! O Jerusalem, you who bring good news, raise your voice loudly! Raise it! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah: “Here is your God!”** <sup>10</sup> **Look! The Lord GOD will come as a Mighty One and His arm will rule for Him. Look! His reward will be with Him and what He has accomplished will go before Him.** <sup>11</sup> **He will take care of His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm. He will carry them in His lap. He will carefully guide those that are suckling young ones.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are two ways of looking at comfort. One way is to think of *feelings and emotions*, with nothing behind it but a good heart. The other way to look at comfort is to *actually do something about what is causing the discomfort, grief, fear, or pain, and make it better*. Right now, we need comfort. We need to know, we need to see, and we need to feel comfort from the pressures and dangers around us - and they are plenty. We observe the bullying tactics of our biggest trading partner China toward Australia. We have an economy that is not too crash hot at the moment since this covid business began. We have the pains of aging and the fears of what we see happening in our world. We know who we are and how we have personally sinned and how little we deserve from God. We need comfort.

Isaiah holds out to us true comfort in our text this morning. He doesn't go for just the feelings, but he speaks God's Word and talks about the *reality* of the comfort, what has been accomplished so that we might have a real and lasting comfort.

He begins with God's Word of comfort. He writes, <sup>1</sup> **“Comfort, comfort My people!” says your God.** <sup>2</sup> **“Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce to it that its compulsory military service is over, that its iniquity has been paid for and that it has received a double equivalent from the hand of the LORD for all its sins!”**

Here we see the will of God - that His people be comforted and strengthened. *“Jerusalem”* is a Biblical figure speech for *“God's chosen people.”* Isaiah is commanded to proclaim the comfort of God to His chosen people. What is this comfort? It is that God has forgiven them their sins - their **“iniquity has been paid for.”** That's the Gospel, the Good News of salvation.

Why is that good news? Because sin is the immediate cause of all of our troubles. Sin causes us to fear. Sin is the source of pain. Sin is the reason why things go wrong with life. Sickness is a symptom of sin. The forgiveness of sins means that all the troubles associated with sin are also removed! That is what the healing miracles of Jesus were primarily about. Jesus would say, *“Your sins are forgiven,”* and then heal them - illustrating the connection between sin and the problems of life. Here, forgiveness is the message following **“announce to it that its compulsory military service is over.”** Jerusalem's warfare - its troubles - has ended because their sins have been forgiven.

Now, remember that this prophecy is spoken a couple of hundred years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity which followed before Jerusalem would desperately need comfort. The end of the warfare and the payment of its iniquity were things to be taken by faith. Our forgiveness is also to be taken by faith. Our sins have been forgiven, and all the symptoms and ailments caused by sin have been ended, but we haven't come entirely to the end just yet. We have the forgiveness, and we have the promise, just like ancient Israel, that the victory is won, and our troubles are over. What we

lack at this moment in time *is the experience of the reality*, just as those to whom the prophet spoke lacked the outward reality to validate the word of the prophet. We walk by faith, not by sight.

When we look back at the words, it is easy for us to believe that the words of comfort of Isaiah were intended for Old Testament Jerusalem, and the people there. They were to read them, and I would guess that God intended for them to find the comfort He spoke, even as it applied to their political and national situation. The Babylonian captivity has come to an end. The end of this captivity did bring comfort to God's people. However, the meaning of the text is not only the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Captivity being dissolved. No, the meaning of the text is Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins. The life of ancient Israel was simply a moving example - an analogy in history if you will. Their real-life experiences were God illustrating in history the spiritual truths of His people, both Old and New Testament.

We are unfaithful Israel. We have been called and made God's people by His gracious choice. Deuteronomy 7:6 says, *"The LORD, your God, has chosen you out of all the other peoples on the surface of the earth to be a people that is His personal property."* We have been rescued. All our sins have been forgiven. Why? Isaiah writes, **"Jerusalem... has received a double equivalent from the hand of the LORD for all its sins!"** The word "double" simply means that God's blessings are ample, abundant, and beyond expectations. The payment has been made. Israel would have naturally thought of the captivity as punishment. The sins of God's people have deserved punishment, but God has offered forgiveness and eternal life instead of punishment. The apostle Paul grasped the meaning of this clause when he wrote, *"where sin increased, God's grace overflowed even more"* (Romans 5:20).

The troubles of our lives are God's way of working in us, purifying us, training us in faith and perseverance and endurance. But they do not pay for our sins. Our sins have already been paid for. They have been fully atoned for. God has poured out His wrath over our sins - and He has poured it out to the full until the cup of wrath is empty. He has poured it out on Jesus, on the cross. Jesus rose from the dead as the proclamation of comfort - we have received double for all our sins - full payment, every bit, only we did not receive it, Jesus did!

Our sins have been forgiven! We have been given the gift of everlasting life in glory! We must not fear! We must not be confused by the troubles and fears and sorrows of our life. They are but a passing thing! All our sins have been removed - as far as the east is from the west, so far has the Lord removed our iniquity from us!<sup>1</sup> Be comforted. Be at peace remembering that the Lord our God is with us to bless and love us, for He has taken away our sins.

Now the prophet shifts gears. He tells us to prepare. He tells us to prepare for the Lord to come. **"<sup>3</sup> A voice of someone calling out in the wilderness: "Prepare a road for the LORD! Make a smooth highway in the desert for our God!"**" Our hearts, not the landscape, is what needs the work. Our sinful hearts and minds are the wilderness that needs to be prepared.

**"<sup>4</sup> Every valley must be raised up and every mountain and hill must be levelled! The uneven land must become a plain and the rugged ground must become a plain!"** The mountains are human pride - our works, our faith, our great piety. They need to be knocked down. We are not saved because we are, or we do anything. We are saved because of Christ and the cross and the glorious grace of our God! The valleys are the pits of unworthiness and self-depreciation and depression. We have no need to fear - and we have no reason to withhold ourselves from trusting God until we feel we are worthy. We cannot be worthy! God has claimed us, chosen us, called us! *We are His* by His work and His choice and His gift. We need to hear that message loud and clear, to confess that message, to believe that message, and to proclaim it to others.

Then **"<sup>5</sup> the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and every human being will see it together." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**" The glory of the Lord is in His great goodness and love and grace, that He has saved us with a salvation so free and wonderful. He has paid the price, and we receive the benefits. That is our Lord's glory - Jesus Christ!

We often hear people speaking about how the times are changing, how the world is different today. The old ways and the old truths are simply not enough - they are no longer relative or effective for us "modern" people. It's true. We could easily agree that this is not our grandfather's Australia. Things have changed a lot in the past 30, 40, 50 years. Sadly, these same people will also say that the Bible and its doctrines are no longer relevant. What was once accepted as the truth of God's Word, no longer applies. Perhaps most of us can remember when our churches were once full of worshippers, keen to hear from God through His Word, and to be served by Him. Now, many have fallen by the wayside, showing their disregard for God, believing they can live a fulfilling life without His direction. Isaiah writes, **"<sup>6</sup> A voice was saying: "Make an announcement!"**

**He kept asking, "What shall I announce?"**

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 103:12

**“All human beings are like grass and all their beauty is like a flower in the field. <sup>7</sup> Grass dries up and a flower withers. For a breath from the LORD blows on it. Certainly, the people are grass! <sup>8</sup> Grass dries up and a flower withers, but the Word of our God will endure for ever.”**”

God’s answer is that however much things and people’s attitudes will change, His Word does not. Lives can be likened to grass that comes and goes and is so fragile and temporary. We are the grass. We are fragile and temporary. Life seems so permanent and long until you have most of it behind you, and you look back on it and see that it is so quick and so brief. **“Grass dries up and a flower withers. For a breath from the LORD blows on it. Certainly, the people are grass!”**

When we watch a movie and hear someone say, “Wow, this is the 1950’s! We are too modern and too ‘in the know’ for that stuff now,” we laugh, because the comments are so anachronistic and silly. But somehow every generation hears someone say that about their own moment in history, and they think it rings profound. God’s perspective is much longer than ours. **“Grass dries up and a flower withers, but the Word of our God will endure for ever.”**

This Word of God is our hope and our comfort, and the changing winds of time cannot touch it. People come and go, but God’s Word is true, and His promises are unchanging. Our salvation is sure because God has guaranteed it. Our sins have been forgiven - we call it “remission of sins.” The word, “remission” means to send it away. **“Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce to it that its compulsory military service is over.”** The Word of God doesn’t rest upon us or our opinions. It isn’t a fad or a fashion or some other creature of time. ***It is the Word of God***. It is the truth of God. It is the gift of God. It is the Good News, and it is the power of God for salvation to all who believe!<sup>2</sup>

It cannot be changed. If we change it, it is no longer Good News! It doesn’t need to be improved. It cannot be destroyed. We can abandon it, but it will not abandon us. We can mess it up, and proclaim something else much more in keeping with the times - but that won’t have the power to save. It won’t have the promise of salvation. It won’t have the power to comfort. God calls to us through the centuries, through His unchanging Word, to proclaim His comfort.

Isaiah finishes this section by writing, <sup>10</sup> **Look! The Lord GOD will come as a Mighty One and His arm will rule for Him. Look! His reward will be with Him and what He has accomplished will go before Him.** <sup>11</sup> **He will take care of His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm. He will carry them in His lap. He will carefully guide those that are suckling young ones.**” Because of His work, God has claimed us as His own, and by grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, we surround this glorious and powerful Lord as sheep surround a shepherd. As God’s people, we are familiar with the picture of the shepherd tenderly caring for his flock. Jesus made use of the image<sup>3</sup>, so did others like David<sup>4</sup> and Ezekiel<sup>5</sup>. The Lord cares for His people. He places the lambs, weak and newly born, in the folds of His garment close to His heart.

What a great message of comfort! As we look forward to the second coming of Jesus, may we continue to find comfort in the fact that our salvation is complete, and that the reward Jesus is bringing with Him is eternal life. May God grant this to us all. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Lord God, we praise You that You reckon us as blameless in Your sight because of Jesus’ obedience for us. We praise You for Your commandments, so that we may love with right knowledge, and for the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask You to bless all who preach, teach, read, and study Your Word, that more and more people may know the Gospel message of joy and hope.

Refine our hearts, so that we may prepare a smooth way for the Lord in them. Give us stronger faith, joy and confidence, and grant that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Enable us to trust You firmly, to worship You with pure hearts, to serve You with clean hands, to obey You with willing minds, and to love You with our whole beings.

Guard us, that Satan, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, or lead us into error, unbelief, and sin. Do not let us lose the inheritance that You have graciously promised to those who know You in faith. Teach us to watch and pray at all times. We praise You that You have enabled us to stand with joy and confidence before the Son of Man when He comes in glory to judge the living and the dead. Therefore send us Your Spirit so that we strive to be blameless in our love for each other, to grow in it, and to practise it with sensitivity and insight.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>3</sup> John 10

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 23

<sup>5</sup> Ezekiel 34

Rid Your church of that all that is divisive, evil, and wrong, that all who profess Your name may serve You in truth, purity, and loyal devotion.

Give peace and stability to the nations on earth. Put down all evil rulers, and raise up leaders who will rule and serve us according to Your good pleasure.

Give to us weather that is appropriate to our needs. If it is Your gracious will, open the windows of heaven and send Your blessing in refreshing rain.

May Jesus rule in the hearts of all parents and children. Supply the spiritual needs of all families, so that truth, love, and high morals may bless our homes.

Be with all people everywhere, in all situations and circumstances of life. Give healing to the sick, comfort to the sorrowing, guidance to the young, hope to the aged, comfort to the bereaved, and wisdom to the perplexed.

Lead us to continue to look to Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. Help us to wait in joyful hope for His second Coming, when He will receive us, and all others who believe in Him, into Your eternal presence. This we pray in His holy name. Amen.

## SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Isaiah 40:1-11

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<sup>9</sup> O Zion, you who bring good news, go up on a high mountain! O Jerusalem, you who bring good news, raise your voice loudly! Raise it! Do not be afraid! Say to the cities of Judah: “Here is your God!” <sup>10</sup> Look! The Lord GOD will come as a Mighty One and His arm will rule for Him. Look! His reward will be with Him and what He has accomplished will go before Him. <sup>11</sup> He will take care of His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arm. He will carry them in His lap. He will carefully guide those that are suckling young ones.

2 Peter 3:8-14

<sup>8</sup> Do not forget this one thing, dearly loved people, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like one day! <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to keep what He has promised, as some people understand slowness. Rather, He is patient with you, because He does not want any to be lost, but wants all to come to

repentance. <sup>10</sup> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, burning will destroy the elements and the earth and the works that are on it will become evident. <sup>11</sup> Since all these things will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people must you be in forms of holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to and hasten, the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed with fire and the elements will melt by burning? <sup>13</sup> Rather, according to His promise, we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, dearly loved people, since you are looking forward to these things, make every effort to be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace!

Mark 1:1-8

<sup>1</sup> The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. <sup>2</sup> As it has been written in the prophet Isaiah: “Look! I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way. <sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord! Make His paths straight!’”

<sup>4</sup> John the Baptist came in the wilderness and preached that people should repent and be baptised for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> All the land of Judea and all the people of Jerusalem kept coming out to him. They were baptised by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

<sup>6</sup> John was dressed in camels’ hair, wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He preached: “He who is mightier than I am is coming after me and I am not worthy to bend down and untie His sandal-straps. <sup>8</sup> I have baptised you with water; but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”