

**December 4, 2011**  
**Advent 2**

*"Comfort My People"*

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**ISAIAH 40:1-11**

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**C**omfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. <sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken." <sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." <sup>9</sup> You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" <sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. <sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

I want you to know what an honor and privilege it is for me to be standing here this morning in front of you and directing your attention to the rich comfort found in this chapter of the prophet Isaiah. This book of the Bible, this book of Isaiah, has often been called "The Fifth Gospel" because it has so much to tell us about Jesus' birth, his death, his resurrection and his kingdom that lasts forever. This great book of the Bible does not hesitate to show us how we do not measure up to God's righteousness, but then it opens our eyes and hearts to see how we are credited with Jesus' righteousness.

Do you like being comforted? Sure you do. You like the comfort that comes to your body from a bowl of chicken soup when your nose is sniffing from a cold. You like the comfort of a good pair of shoes for your long walks or hikes. You like the comfort of a goose down on a cold night in December when the heat is turned down and the window is cracked open for fresh air. You love the comfort that comes from people who care about you and brighten up your day. And you love, you love, so much the comfort that God's Word gives you as it lets you see a heavenly Father who cared so much about you that he was willing to give up his Son for you. You never stop being amazed at how the Holy Spirit, your Comforter, comes to you in your low moments of life, quietly and serendipitously, to remind you of some aspect of God's love for you, or one of his amazing promises.

When we were little children we enjoyed taking oranges, rolling them to break up the juice inside and then poking a hole into the orange to suck out all the juice. Let's do that with these words from Isaiah. Let's squeeze all the comfort these words have to give us.

## **Tell them they have complete payment for all our sins**

"Comfort, comfort my people says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand could for all her sins." These words were spoken to people who were captives in the land of Babylon. Listen to their sad song in Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps." Life has its hard moments when our hallelujahs get stuck in our throats and our songs of praise never leave our lips. Now it is over. It is time to go home, back to Jerusalem and sing again.

Comfort my people. Tell them that their sin has been pardoned. "Her sin has been paid for and she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Oh, how empty and hopeless our lives would be if we had to depend on our hands and our hearts and our lives to make payment for our sin. As we heard in our sermon last week from Isaiah 64 even our righteous acts are filthy rags in the sight of God. Even our most shining moments are always tainted with sin that makes our best efforts fall short of God's glory. Comfort my people. Tell them they have received double payment from the hand of the Lord. The hand of God took every sin you ever committed and placed it all on Jesus. "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all." The hand of God punished Jesus in our place. "He was delivered for our offenses and raised against for our justification." The hand of God raised Jesus from the dead as the supreme evidence and announcement that we have received from the hand of the Lord, double for all our sin.

Comfort my people. Tell them that through Jesus they are justified, declared forgiven, and that they have access 24/7 to the unfailing love of God their heavenly Father. "Therefore, since we have been justified we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand." Comfort my people. Tell them because of Jesus, the goodness and mercy of the Lord will follow them every single day, every single hour, every single minute and every single second of their lives.

## **Tell them they will see the glory of the Lord**

Comfort my people. Tell them to get ready to see the glory of the Lord. "A voice of one calling; In the desert prepare the way for the Lord, make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Overnight, the glory of the Lord God overthrew the power of Babylon. Cyrus the new King told God's people they could go home.

God's people had seen his glory in the past. When they were starving to death in the wilderness, Moses comforted them with the good news, "In the morning you will see the glory of the Lord." The next morning they woke up. The ground was white. Had it snowed the night before? Was there a heavy frost? No, the ground was covered with a special food from the Lord which they called "Manna." No chicken soup, or soft mashed potatoes or cinnamon roll fresh from the oven could offer more comfort than that miracle of manna

falling from heaven.

Comfort my people. Tell them to get ready for Christmas. Tell them to think about seeing the glory of the Lord in a manger in Bethlehem. Are you ready for Christmas? I am not talking about the getting ready that involves getting the decorations out of storage, or finding a tree, or putting up the lights, or getting ready for the kids to come home. Comfort my people. Tell them to get ready to celebrate Jesus' birth, his amazing coming into the flesh. Tell them to see the glory of their God in the words of John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Listen to the Christmas song that says, "Mary did you know? Mary did you know that when you kissed your little child you kissed the face of God?" Comfort my people. Tell them this is Christmas. This is a time to worship Christ and kneel with the shepherds and see the glory of God in a manger. Tell them it won't be long before we see Jesus coming again on clouds of glory

### **Tell them God's Word lasts forever**

Comfort my people. Tell them God's word never changes, even though changes are happening so quickly all around us. "A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All men are grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field, the grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

We know what happens to the grass that is green in the spring. We know what happens to flowers that bloom and then fade such as these roses from my side yard. Animals we love grow old and then die. People we love also grow old and die. The gray hair, the aches and pains in the body, the bottles of medicine are all evidence that people are like the grass that dies and the flowers that fall.

God told Adam and Eve that their lives would change if they did not listen to his command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Oh, how their lives changed when they rebelled against their God and opened the door to death. Movie stars get old and wrinkled. Sports heroes have career ending injuries. Steve Jobs died this past year. Did you know he attended a Bible teaching Lutheran Church and took catechism classes when he lived with his parents in the Bay Area? Only God's Word gives us blessings that last forever and can never be taken away from us.

Comfort my people. Tell them how the word of our God stands forever. 1 Peter chapter one tells us, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God." Then it goes on to quote these words from Isaiah to prove that God's Word stands forever and God's Word creates a new life and new birth that also lasts forever. The seed of a man that is planted into a woman produces a child that is destined to die. The seed of God's Word creates a new birth makes you part of a kingdom that lasts forever. God's Word stands forever and it will not fail you.

### **Tell them their God is a shepherd**

Comfort my people. Comfort them with the good news that the Lord their God is comes to

them as a loving Shepherd. Go up to the highest mountain. Shout it as loud as you can. Put it on the radio. Put it on television. Post it on the internet. Share it on Facebook. "Say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God!' Oh my people look at your God! He is coming to you! Do you see him? Do you see him coming with great power to help you? Your God is your Refuge and Strength, an ever present help in trouble. Do you see him bringing rewards for you? These are rewards that you don't deserve that were won for you by Jesus your mighty God and Savior. You know him. Yes, you do know him. He is your Jesus, your Yishua, your Deliverer. He is your Wonderful, your Counselor, your Mighty God, your Everlasting Father, your Prince of Peace.

Oh, look at your God. See him coming to you as loving shepherd. "He tends his flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arm and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young." He is ready to take you to green pastures of his love so beautiful it will bring tears to your eyes. See him holding you in his arms. You are his lamb. You can feel his heart beating can't you? He is so close to you. He gently leads you. Even if it means going through the valley of the shadow of death he will be with you. His rod and staff will comfort you. Comfort my people. Tell them their God is a Shepherd who comes to them. Tell them their sin is forgiven. Tell them to get ready to see his glory. Tell them his Word stands forever. Comfort them. Comfort them. Amen.