**“Comfort, Comfort”**

#

Isaiah 40:1-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

 Advent 2

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Bridge

I don’t know about you, but (this year) I have **huge demands** of each and every one of the Advent texts of this season. Because of COVID in general and IT VERY SPECIFIC (one among us who would be here is not because of it), I expect ALL of God’s prophecies that we’ll hear running up until Christmas to “prepare my way for the Lord”. Today (I should tell you) **doesn’t let me down**.

Text

Isaiah chapter 40, till the end, is called the 5th Gospel of Scripture. What it follows is an almost Old Testament **summary** of history over not just a **rough year**, but a **rough 3,000 years**. Now, don’t get me wrong, some times in that 3,000 years didn’t **look** (on the surface) very horrible. There was (much of it) shopping and music and time for vacations and friendships and sports and lots of distractions (including prosperity) all over the centuries. But wars were also being fought regularly and people argued and some people unfairly inflicted themselves upon others, school was challenging and people got sick … and they all (family, friends, and themselves all alike) fell ill and, eventually, got incurably ill. And spouses and children and friends had to bury people they loved and enjoyed in this life. They had to miss them for the rest of their earthly days until some future reunion of the faithful could make that grief and loneliness and change **different and mute**. In other words, I’m not (you’re not / we’re all not) the first to experience 2020’s phenomenon of yuck and pain and confusion and anger and disgust. We’re not the first to demand from God’s prophesy Words that can cut through the horrors of bad situations.

Israel was a good representative of the world that was at least **hopeful for God’s grace and Good**. It was like us, both (some of it) in Christianity-in-specific and (some of it also) in much of a religious homage toward some deity in general. And it was that quest because everyone wants and needs **hope in the face of hopelessness**. The **truth of that hope** is available to anyone who’s willing to listen to it. The demand and yearning got **met** by God’s **sure prophetic voice that Isaiah documented**.

“**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.**” It’s interesting that **before the Lord calls upon US to repent, HE DOES**. The Hebrew used here is “nawkham” which, literally, means to **sigh in repentance** (sometimes used as a regret, but always as **a release of what trouble had gone before it**).

**God’s repentance is mercy**, giving not what “His people” deserve upon **their repentance** but **what He grants in “pardoned iniquity” and a “double portion” of “tenderness”**. Upon all that His people (Israel) had faced in all of history, the God of Creation, and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (the God who **is God**) now speaks the promise of “comfort” upon pain and “warfare” (sin released / **repented- and relented-of** **both ways**). And **HOW** would that “comfort” arrive and be able to be given? This is how Isaiah 40 and beyond is the 5th Gospel: **by the One who the “voice in the wilderness” announces, John the Baptist, the “preparer of the Way of the Lord” (the “Way”, Jesus, who’d sacrifice His life in “wounds that would heal us”)**.

The **fact is**, “all flesh **is** grass, and all its beauty **is like** the flower of the field. The grass **withers**, the flower **fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it**; surely the people **are grass**.” Apparently that expression comes from a 48 hour period in May when desert winds **that quickly** turn lush greenery brown and dry. …. The **suddenness** of our tragedies are no surprise to this world. **God’s remedy** is **His Word (Jesus and His victory over the grave and our receipt of that by being baptized into it, believing) that** **“will stand forever**”.

We **can** repent (or, relent) of the tragedy of our sin (our “warfare”), and God’s relenting (repenting) “comfort” **can** return to us grace. Martin Luther preaches of this: “God’s people are those **needing comfort and knowing it** because we have been wounded and terrified by our knowledge of our sin, therefore an empty vessel before the Lord **capable (since empty of our own abilities) to rely on God and receive ‘comfort’**. Only those **afflicted** have comfort and are capable of receiving it, because **comfort means nothing unless there is malady and distress**”.

Application

And “comfort” is remembered in this season **having come**. I know about so many of you (even the **you in general** who are all part of this world experiencing pandemic, unrest, and all that is the wages of even our sins which we contribute to the mess). **We are distressed and afflicted in “malady”**, **death** even so ever-present and seemingly more-so-now in the hearing of these Words from God.

But the “**beginning of the Gospel**” is **“comfort, comfort” (double over)** as Isaiah starts it and **“Jesus Christ, the Son of God”** as Mark does. It’s the “Word of God” that “stands forever” made incarnate as, first, a baby born of a woman to defeat sin, death, and the devil as well as **the “sting” of death through His death then resurrection**. It’s His gift to us of **its benefits** by calling those also-repenting “My people”. It’s “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness truly dwells” that **we’re given to “wait for” promised as hope … and, with God, hope never disappoints us**. And it’s a faithful and always-ready “**voice**” from God’s prophetic speech for ears to hear and hearts to receive and lives to enjoy and spread.

As I said, **I need** “the Way of the Lord” **prepared in me (seemingly especially this season, yet maybe more receptive this season)**. And His prophetic Word and actions in history and continued promises-from-that **DELIVERS**. “The Lord **is not slow to fulfill** His promise as some count slowness” (the Epistle reminds us), “but **is patient toward us, not wishing that any should perish, but that** **all should reach repentance**”.

Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name, Amen.