

Isaiah 40:1-11

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Isaiah says "Comfort, O Comfort my people says your God." Doesn't that sound nice? God is comforting us. But think about that for a minute. What does it mean to be comforted? What would comfort you? Remember the commercial for the hectic, busy mother who can't wait for a moment of peace, "Calgon take me away." Yea you remember that, I can see you nodding. That's an advertisement for comfort. Or how the ad about the kids that are itching because of bugs or poison ivy and they are looking for relief, and they get "AaaHhhhh, Aveeno!" That's another commercial for comfort. Or still yet there is the one with the man who is awake in bed, coughing and sneezing, and wheezing, with fever and a cold, and he drinks Nyquil and then he is seen fast asleep all comfy in bed. That's a sense of comfort. All these and so many more commercials aim at you finding comfort if you only buy their item. Is that the kind of comfort this text means? Yes, when the hecticness of everything is weighing down on you, a bath to some people is very peaceful and comforting. When you have a rash some relief from that constant itch would be comforting. When you're sick, a good night's sleep feels awful comfortable.

What Comfort would you seek, what relief would you ask for if you could have one comfort wish granted. - Some might choose health. Human bodies no matter our ages have certain breakdowns, arthritis, lungs, kidneys, cancer, whatever we are talking about there are many pains and sufferings people have related to their health. What if you could wipe all those worries away. Would that be comfort!

Others may choose to seek comfort in family concerns. Who doesn't have some family or friendship that has hurt them and the relationship is suffering. Parents saying comments that diminish their children, no matter the age. Children in acts of defiance strike out verbally at their parents just to push their buttons, because they know they can. There are spouses that hurt each other tearing apart families. There are friendships that have fallen apart, all due to communication, trust, and love breakdowns. Wouldn't that be a great comfort if you could just wipe away all those worries, problems, issues. From this moment on who wouldn't want some comfort from these problems of relationships?

Yet still others may have financial worries they wouldn't mind some relief from. To be debt free, no mortgage payments or rent due each month, no bills, credit cards or loan payments looming over you every month. To be relieved of the constant need to live pay check to pay check just to stay on top. That would be a definite sense of comfort to some people.

Or even still yet, some people may choose peace from wars. Today is the Pearl Harbor Remembrance. A Sunday morning, 67 years ago the air raid sirens came to life on a surprise attack by Japan upon the American Air Bases and Naval yards of Hawaii. 2350 people died and thousands more injured. That one morning attack brought the U.S. into the war that would last four more years and cost hundreds of thousands of lives. But even on this day as we look back and honor the men and women who have served this country faithfully, we remember there have been other wars, American Revolution, war of 1812, Civil War, Spanish-American, WWI, WWII, Korean, Vietnam, Panama Invasion, Grenada Invasion, Gulf War, and today the Iraq war and war in Afghanistan that continues. And that list doesn't even contain the hundreds of other wars, revolutions and skirmishes that happen throughout the world between other countries some going on right now. An end to violence, war and hatred, would definitely be a sense of comfort.

Comfort could come in short bottled things, or comfort from emotional problems, physical problems, worldly problems. All of us seek comfort. So what kind of comfort is Isaiah talking about here in our Gospel reading.

But none of those truly capture the image I believe Isaiah is trying to convey with his words here about Comfort. The people of Isaiah's time were dealing with relationship problems, economic problems, and violence that was all around. But more than what we talked about today in our world. You see the Assyrian empire and later the Babylonian empire conquered the lands of Israel, the northern kingdom had fallen and was now overrun by their enemy. Judah, the last remaining people of God's covenant, the country in the South was trembling and ready to fall. Families had been enslaved and torn apart. People were killed and carried off in war as prisoners. Their crops were taken or burnt. Their homes were ransacked and torn down. Their cities even were to be leveled and decimated. They knew what family turmoil was, they knew what economic ruin was, they knew starvation, homelessness, they knew what war, violence, slavery felt like, because that was their lives. Those people were seeking a comfort so great that it was beyond something you buy in a bottle for a good night's sleep. They needed God's almighty, all powerful comfort. They sought something that would save them from this life of destruction and suffering. Beyond the moment in the bathroom tub, soothing anti-itch remedy, the good night's rest, they weren't even seeking comfort from money problems, or relationships, or health concerns. They were concerned with the core struggle of all, they sought comfort from death itself; they were seeking the life that only God could bring. And Isaiah prophesies, "A voice cries out; In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every Valley shall be lifted up and every mountain and hill be made low. The uneven ground shall become level and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." From

Babylon to Israel and down to Judah were vast areas of wilderness. The people sought a highway that would bring them home again. And Isaiah grants them hope, that the way will open up, and God will come and reveal the glory that overcomes all worries, struggles, and pains, and even death itself granting comfort where there is no comfort.

Did you notice in verse 6, Isaiah says that a Voice, (we assume it is the Lord's voice or at least an angel of the Lord speaking). Anyway the voice says to Cry out!" and Isaiah says what shall I cry. The people had been crying out. They had been crying in pain and worry. They had cried out in hunger and nakedness. They had cried out in death and torture. But now the voice says to cry out a reminder that even all those things that we have cried out are only momentary. We think they are big things now in our lives because we are living in this moment. A sickness that puts you in the hospital, not knowing if you will recover or not is a major life crisis. But Isaiah reminds us here that yet even in that we know God is greater than that, because human life is like grass that wither and dies. We sprout up and grow and bloom and wither and die. We are like grass. The twist you see in this text is that the comfort that is coming is so much more than just AHHH Aweeenoo! It is so much more than just a recovery from a bankruptcy or a divorce, or even the end to the latest war. It is a comfort that lasts forever. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of our God will stand forever.

The answer to that Cry out question doesn't even show up until the end of this part on verse 9. "What shall I cry, Cry out, Here is your God!" That is the comforting word that we seek. The Lord is coming with might. God will tend the sheep and gather us in as lambs into the kingdom that has no pain, sorrow, struggle, or despair. We cry out here is God. What better news is there to hear this day and every day? Even Mark says this in our Gospel reading, "The beginning of the Good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". During this advent season, as we await the coming of the Lord, let us hear those words of Isaiah, we are like grass, the worries we have, the struggles we have will pass and yet no matter what happens, we are God's people, never forgotten. Never alone. Even pains and anguish, problems and death itself will not keep God from us. One day that hunger will end; that hatred will end, that illness will end those disagreements will end; all things that we worry about now that seem so important, that wear us down and crush our thoughts and our shoulders under stress and anxiety, all those things will come to an end. But the Word of our God stands forever. Here is your God. Jesus Christ made real, incarnate. Alive for ever. Receive that gift this day. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

