

Isaiah 40:1-8  
“Comfort, Comfort Ye My People”  
Advent Midweek 3

December 15, 2021  
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.  
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

The Gospel has everything to do with comfort. But how we received forgiveness of sins – *by grace through faith in Jesus* – may not sound comforting to some.

Yes, by faith in Christ, our sins are paid for. But in order to have our sins paid for, Jesus had to suffer and die. So, through Christ’s atoning death, our **“iniquity is pardoned”** (Isaiah 40:2) and we have received from the Lord double for all our sins.

In Christ alone, we have received a double payment of **“comfort, comfort.”**

Within the past few years at First Lutheran Church and all-around Glencoe, road construction and upgrading sewers and pipes has been an uncomfortable enterprise. The closure of Morningside Drive and county highway 15 added minutes to our drive. But now that all the construction is complete, we are enjoying freshly paved streets and we relish in the comfort of it all!

Now, as you heard our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 40 read earlier, did you hear hammers and bulldozers? Did you cough in the dusty air? Bringing comfort has its uncomfortable side.

The voice cries: “Get that earthmover in here! Get that blasting crew! This valley and mountain must be leveled!”

A highway is going through and it’s not going around the mountains. It’s not going through the valleys.

This highway is the Messiah coming and He doesn’t reroute for anybody. Nothing can stand in His way – not mountains or valleys – and if you’re in the way, you’re getting leveled.

## *[Comforting News Announced]*

The Advent hymn “Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People” presents us with the spiritual discomfort involved in receiving the Advent message of comfort. The hymn “Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People” is the work of a German court preacher named Johann Olearius (1611-1684). This hymn was not originally written as an Advent hymn but was written for the festival of St. John the Baptist, which is June 24. Eventually it became an Advent hymn, since it is so closely associated with the Advent reading from Isaiah 40:1-8.

In the hymn, Olearius stays close to the text of Isaiah, moving from one biblical expression to the next with ease. The effect is that the hymn is able to retain the strength and vitality of Isaiah’s original message while conveying all the hope and joy it can bring to people now.

Together with Isaiah’s picture of dismantling, uprooting, and leveling, these phrases of the hymn present us with an essentially discomfoting task. But through all this discomfort, comes comfort.

Let’s look at stanza one:

1 *“Comfort, comfort ye My people,  
    Speak ye peace,” thus saith our God;  
    “Comfort those who sit in darkness,  
    Mourning ’neath their sorrows’ load.  
    Speak ye to Jerusalem  
    Of the peace that waits for them;  
    Tell her that her sins I cover  
    And her warfare now is over.”*

Text: Public domain

Here, stanza one closely follows the text of Isaiah 40:1-2, which the Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to encourage God’s exiled people in Babylon. Here, God is proclaiming the good news through the prophet, announcing to them the fulfillment of His gracious promise to cover their sins and end their warfare. They would be coming home as His restored people.

For us, we have all experienced the effects of sin in our lives as a time of sorrow, and a period of mourning. We have sat in darkness. The only cure for this grieving is comfort, the peace that announces that our sins are covered.

Though we struggle in our life – due to sin, Christ steadily walked to the cross and paid the price – the full cost – for our sinning ways. So, through repentance and faith in Christ, our sins are paid for.

But, as we live in a sinful world, this is a peace that we must wait for. This is a peace that we have hope for. This is a peace that is made sure by the death and resurrection of Jesus, whose peace is proclaimed and shared in each celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

### *[Joy of Forgiveness]*

Moving on to stanza two:

2 *Yea, her sins our God will pardon,  
Blotting out each dark misdeed;  
All that well deserved His anger  
He no more will see or heed.  
She hath suffered many\_a day,  
Now her griefs have passed away;  
God will change her pining sadness  
Into ever-springing gladness.*

Text: Public domain

With these words, we meditate on the joy that God’s forgiveness brings. For everyone who has languished in their sins are assured that they are being pardoned now for each “*dark misdeed.*” This is a total forgiveness we receive as not one sin is left unforgiven. So, those who sat in darkness have seen a great light as they are called to experience a new life.

Now, all sinners really deserve God’s anger and wrath, but in God’s great mercy, as we confess our sins to Him, He will remember our sins no more.

The last two lines of stanza two are reminiscent of Luther’s “Great Exchange” as we sang:

*God will change her pining sadness  
Into ever-springing gladness.*

By faith in Jesus, we are given “*ever-springing gladness*” in exchange for “*pining sadness*”! In exchange for what we truly deserve, which is eternal death, God gives us eternal life.

You see, due to His suffering and death, Jesus declared Himself to be in solidarity with all sinners. So, just as Jesus became fully man at His incarnation, He also takes upon Himself the sins of the world. In doing so, Jesus becomes the biggest sinner in the world! This is the Great Exchange. This uncomfortable act brings us comfort!

*[Called to Life of Repentance]*

Further Advent themes begin to emerge in stanzas three and four. First, we hear a voice crying in the desert:

3 *Hark, the herald's voice is crying  
In the desert far and near,  
Calling sinners to repentance,  
Since the Kingdom now is here.  
O that warning cry obey!  
Now prepare for God a way;  
Let the valleys rise to meet Him  
And the hills bow down to greet Him.*

Text: Public domain

This voice crying in the desert is John the Baptist. Through his words, all are urged to prepare a way for God by repenting and bearing the fruits of repentance through “*that warning cry obey.*” John the Baptist cries out: “*Prepare! Repent!*” John is calling us to faith in Christ and to receive His forgiveness, because anyone who is standing in the Lord’s way when He comes will be leveled.

Here, all of humanity is urged to “*prepare for God a way,*” so that every valley is lifted up and every hill brought low, bowing down to greet Him.

4 *Make ye straight what long was crooked;  
Make the rougher places plain.  
Let your hearts be true and humble,  
As befits His holy reign.  
For the glory of the Lord  
Now o'er earth is shed abroad,  
And all flesh shall see the token  
That His Word is never broken.*

Text: Public domain

In the final stanza, God's people are called to a life of repentant straightening of what long was crooked. As God's people, we are to make the roughest places plain as we prepare with "*true and humble*" hearts to be ready for God's holy reign.

Now, this Kingdom of God is already here since our salvation has been accomplished through Jesus. Until Christ comes again, He still comes to us through His Word and Sacraments, which is proof "*that His Word is never broken.*" "***The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever***" (Isaiah 40:8).

This is so comforting to hear! In a world that is full of uncertainty and worry that makes us feel withered and helpless, the Word of our God is always certain. God's voice is always strong and clear. His voice gives us the strength and certainty that we lack. His voice always refreshes and renews us!

Just as we sing of the dismantling, uprooting, and leveling in this hymn, God does the same to us. You see, in Holy Baptism, we die to sin with Christ and then rise to new life. In Christ, we are "***a new creation***" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through the Triune God – *the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* – He continues to shape us as He strengthens our faith as we hear His Word that endures forever and receive His forgiveness through our confession of sins and in receiving His very Body and Blood under the bread and the wine. He alone gives us strength to live out our faith in this uncomfortable sinful world.

This is great comfort. In response to this great comfort, we ought to share this amazing comfort with those around us, especially to the hurting and broken people in our lives, so they too, can be comforted. "***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God***" (1 Corinthians 1:3-4).

In Christ alone, we have received comfort. "***Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that he warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins***" (Isaiah 40:1-2). Amen.

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

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠