

#1806

(Cf. #121 #445 #858 #1096 #1420)

Isaiah 40:1&2¹

God comforts his people.

2nd Sunday in Advent

Supplementary Lectionary Series "B,"

Old Testament, adapted

Pastor A. J. Kunde

Grace WELS Durand MI

December 8, 2013

Voters: Budget & Elections

WSC: Retreat Survey

^{40:1} Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² 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.

THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE

I. THROUGH HIS WORD

II. BY HIS GRACE

III. BY HIS ATONEMENT

In the Name of Jesus our Savior, who came once to take away our sins and is coming again to bring us into eternal life in heaven, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

The Season of Advent in the Church Year looks back and looks forward. Advent looks back to the coming of the Messiah. Advent takes us to the manger in Bethlehem, to the shepherds on the fields of the plains of Bethlehem, to the hearing of the angel's announcement: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the LORD" (Luke 2:11). Advent prepares us for the proper celebration of Christmas. Advent also looks forward.

Advent looks forward beyond the manger, beyond Jesus' earthly public ministry, beyond his cross, death and burial, beyond his resurrection from the dead, and beyond his ascension. Advent looks forward to Jesus' Second Coming, when he will raise all the dead and give to all believers in him eternal life. For both those ancient believers before Jesus came and for us who have been brought to faith since Jesus' came, Isaiah's message is timely. Isaiah's message is this: THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE. THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE ... I. THROUGH HIS WORD; II. BY HIS GRACE; and, III. BY HIS ATONEMENT.

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE
I. THROUGH HIS WORD

***40:1 Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
2 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 (40:1,2).***

Speak to Jerusalem. Proclaim to Jerusalem. Who does this speaking? Who does this proclaiming? A number are mentioned.

The first part of the verse following our text states, "A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God'" (40:3). When the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law, the Priests and Levites came out to Jerusalem to see and listen to John the Baptizer, they asked him,

22 'Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' John replied in the Words of Isaiah the Prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the LORD' (John 1:22,23).

Thus the comforting Words that God wanted proclaimed to his people included the Words of John the Baptizer, who called for repentance for sin and faith in the Messiah who was about to come on to the scene. But others were also to speak and proclaim Words of comfort.

The same Jerusalem, Zion, and Judah, who were to receive these Words of comfort, were also to proclaim these Words of comfort. A more correct translation of the Hebrew than that given by the NIV translation is this:

***O Zion, Bringer of Good Tidings,
go up on a high mountain.
O Jerusalem, Bringer of Good Tidings,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!" (40:9).***

Here Jerusalem and Zion are references to the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Fellowship of All Believers in Jesus. The Church was and is to proclaim and speak this comfort. But the actual comfort itself originates neither with John the Baptizer nor with Jerusalem, Zion, the Holy Christian Church. Good Tidings of comfort is from God.

Isaiah writes, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (40:1). Thus, Jerusalem, Zion, the Church, is both the receiver of the Good Tidings and the proclaimer of the Good Tidings. And the message which Jerusalem, Zion, the Church receives and proclaims, is a message of comfort from God.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (40:1). When is such comfort needed; and, what is that comfort?

Comfort is needed when God’s people are faced with the trials, turmoils, tribulations and troubles of life. Comfort is needed when God’s people face financial hardships and uncertainty. Comfort is needed when God’s people encounter sickness, disease, illness and incapacity. Comfort is needed when God’s people are confronted with their sins and iniquities, and are brought to realize the punishment they deserve because of their sins. Comfort is needed when God’s people are brought face to face with death and the grave. And the LORD God gives this comfort.

The LORD God gives this comfort. “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (40:1). The LORD God gives this comfort through what he says. The LORD God gives you comfort through his Word.

APPROPRIATION

The LORD God comforts you through his Word. In your times of trial, tribulation, turmoil, troubles, stress and problems, the LORD God comforts you through his Word. When you face illness, incapacity and disease, the LORD God comforts you with this Word. As you face these uncertain economic times, the LORD God comforts and encourages you with his Word. As you yourself face death and the grave and as you mourn the passing away of fellow Christians, the LORD God comforts you with his Word. How important it is, then, to hold on to that Word of God in truth and purity!

Jesus told his followers, “If you continue in my Word, then you really are my disciples” (cf. John 8:31). To be a disciple of Jesus, a follower of Jesus, a believer in Jesus, takes place through Jesus’ Word, the Gospel. To have the comfort that is so necessary in your life also comes through God’s Word. In addition, it is through connection with God’s Word that you continue in faith in Jesus.

Jesus told the Jews who refused to believe in him, “He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” (John 8:47). Those who depart from God’s Word, remove themselves from God’s Word, permit false teaching and practice to infiltrate their hearts and minds, are separating themselves from the LORD God. Those who refuse to hear, read, learn and inwardly digest God’s Holy Word, are distancing themselves from the LORD God himself. Those who do not continue in worship and Holy Communion, are robbing themselves of the Means of Grace – the means alone by which God calls to faith and keeps in faith. Such separation takes place all too often.

It has probably happened to you. You may have been tempted to skip private Bible reading or family devotions. You may have been tempted to skip attendance at worship and Holy Communion. So you skip once or twice and then continuously. You have set a pattern of not hearing, not worshipping, not reading God's Word. Jesus warns, "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Revelation 3:11). Do not let go of God's Word.

The Word of our LORD God is our comfort in life, during the trials and troubles of life, and as we face the grave. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God" (40:1a). God himself gives us that comfort through his Word.

God's comfort in Jesus comes to you through his Word. Moreover, this comfort from God comes to you also by his grace.

THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE II. BY HIS GRACE

The LORD says through Isaiah, "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" (40:2). Isaiah writes that Jerusalem "has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." Double what?

What "double" from the LORD's hand has Jerusalem received? Has Jerusalem received double punishment from the LORD's hand? If that is the case, where is the comfort in that message? To understand the meaning of what Isaiah is saying, we need to look at from whom the "double" is coming?

Jerusalem "has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins." This "double" is from the hand of the LORD God, the same one who is both the proclaimer and source of the comfort proclaimed and given. It is the LORD, the God of free and faithful grace, who is speaking. It is the God of free and faithful grace, the LORD, who is giving this comfort. Thus, the comfort, which the LORD God proclaims and gives, is by grace. It is by God's undeserved love. Now, we can understand the "double." The LORD God gives "double" grace. St. Paul put this truth in these words, "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Romans 5:20).

APPROPRIATION

This double grace for all of your sins has been given to you. That is why you are comforted.

The comfort that you have from your LORD God comes to you without any merit, worth, effort or good works on your part. You see, if there were even a spark of merit in you by which God would be obligated to comfort you, then that comfort would no longer be by grace alone.

The comfort that the LORD gives is by grace alone. It is a free gift. During Christmas, the giving and exchanging of gifts is usually practiced. Sometimes Christmas gifts are given on the basis of what a person deserves or merits. That is not the case with God's gift of comfort.

God's gift of comfort to you comes through Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings you to faith and keeps you in faith through the Gospel. That faith, which is also a gift of God's grace – that faith is in Jesus Christ as your Savior. The comfort that the LORD gives and the comfort that you have, comes by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus.

By the LORD God's grace through faith you have divine comfort. Isaiah also tells us how God went about providing this comfort for you. The LORD God gives comfort through atonement.

THE LORD COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE III. BY HIS ATONEMENT

Isaiah writes, "Proclaim to her [Jerusalem] that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for" (40:2b). What did Jerusalem deserve for her sins? She deserved hard service. She deserved warfare. She deserved punishment. Jerusalem deserved condemnation. How did Jerusalem not receive all of these terrible consequences for her sins? Isaiah says, "Her sin has been paid for" – her sin has been atoned for.

Jerusalem's sin has been atoned for. Her sin was atoned for by loading her sin on the Lamb of God. Her sin was atoned for by making "Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" to be "the atoning sacrifice ... for the sins of the whole world" (cf. 1 John 2:1b,2). The LORD's own hand accomplished this – his hands nailed to the cross. The LORD's own suffering and death finished this – "It is finished!" (John 19:30b). How did Jerusalem receive double grace for all her sins? The LORD himself took upon himself Jerusalem's punishment. The LORD God, Jesus Christ, suffered and died on the cross by which he took away the sins of the world.

APPROPRIATE

So also your sins have been atoned for by Jesus. Jesus' blood and righteousness has covered over all your sins.

Have you sinned against your parents and others in authority? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Have you misused and been irresponsible with the authority and responsibility God has given you? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Have you hurt or harmed you neighbor in what you have done or said? Have you harbored anger and resentment toward your neighbor? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Have you ruined the loving companionship God intends for your marriage and family? Have you indulged in immoral thoughts, words or gestures? Have you lusted after a woman or a man? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Have you taken that which does not belong to you, coveted or envied what your

neighbor has? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Does your conscience bother you? Does Satan accuse you? Does the devil throw against you his slanders? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Are your sins like scarlet? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. Are your sins like crimson? By Jesus' cross and suffering, your sin is atoned for. You have the LORD's own atonement for your sin, and thus you have the LORD's own comfort.

CONCLUSION

God's Old Testament people needed the comfort that was proclaimed to them in Isaiah Chapter 40. Their sins, iniquities, transgressions and trespasses were many. They would be carried off into the Babylonian Captivity because of their sins. They would be tempted to think that God completely abandoned them. But, through the Prophet Isaiah, God proclaimed to them comfort and forgiveness for all of their sins.

God's New Testament people are guilty of the same sins, iniquities, transgressions and trespasses. God's New Testament people, you and me, also need the LORD's comfort. We have that comfort through his Word, by his grace, and by his atonement. Through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus our Savior, God has forgiven us and comforted us. The LORD comforts you through his Son Jesus your Savior. Amen.