

2nd Sunday in Advent Kirkgate Parish church-06/12/2020

1. Welcome and notices

2. Call to worship

“You, my child, will be called a Prophet of the Most High God. You will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his road for him, to tell his people that they will be saved by having their sins forgiven.” (Luke 1: 76 – 77)

3. ADVENT CANDLES SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READER: Jesus is coming and we are preparing to welcome him again into the world and into our lives. We light the Advent candles to celebrate the many gifts we receive and to name the gifts we offer to others. Last Sunday was the first Sunday in Advent. The first Advent candle is the candle of hope. We light it again today and remember the gift of hope.

Today we also light the Second Advent candle, the candle of love. Isaiah paints a peaceful picture of God the Shepherd, feeding the flock. God lifts and carries the lambs and gently leads the mother sheep. Peter reminds us of God’s promise of a new heaven and a new earth where justice reigns. And so today on the Second Sunday of Advent we are encouraged to be at peace with one another and to be filled with God’s love.

A person lights the first two candles

READER: As we light these candles, we celebrate the gifts of love and hope we are given in our minds and hearts when we come to God in faith. We look forward to the promised day when nations will live together in peace; and when we will learn, not about war, but about God and about one another. **Let us pray together:**

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus, the Light of the world. We are thankful for the gifts of hope and love in our hearts this Christmas. We hear your call for us to be peace-makers in the world. Help us today and every day to be grateful, to hear your Word and to do your will by sharing your love with others. We ask these things in the name of the One born again in our hearts, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

4. Song: CH4 291 When out of poverty is born, a dream that will not die,.. The Lord is coming don’t lose heart. Be blest; prepare the way

5. Prayer of adoration and praise.

Disturbing God, we thank you for the witness of John the Baptist. Help us to be open to the changing power of your love, and to be true witnesses to the power of Jesus in our lives.

Loving and ever-present God, the God of Isaiah of old and the Church of now, in this Advent Season, we heed your call to prepare for your coming.

As the sun rises, Father, with the promise of a new day, so you come again to your people, always new, always true, always real. As we come to church again, and greet one another in the fellowship of faith, so you greet your returning people; you throw your arms open in welcome, and lift up your hands to bless us all.

Yet we know, we have to ask ourselves... are we really prepared – and truly thankful - for the glory of a new day? Are we prepared for our time in the presence of our God? Are we prepared for the acceptance of your blessing? We hope we are. We try to be ready. And yet, how ill prepared we really are.

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Our faith tells us to prepare, but our busyness with other things often means we don't give the time. Our hearts are ready to receive you, but our lives often don't show that in practice. Our calling is to make a highway in our deserts for our God, but often we prepare no more than a rutted track or an indistinct trail. Forgive us Lord, for saying but not doing, believing but not acting, praying but not performing.

You call us to get ready for your coming. Forgive us when our preparations fall short of your expectations. And in the silence, we ask for forgiveness. And in the silence, we give time to be more ready for your love.

Silence

Be assured, God tells us, that I will not forsake my people. Arise, and go forward. Your sins are forgiven. So, ever-present God, send your Holy Spirit upon us now. Strengthen us in our commitment. Hold us to your purpose. Christ our Lord is coming. Let us be ready.

For all this we pray through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. **Amen.**

6. Scripture readings: Isaiah 40:1-11

1 "Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them! 2 Encourage the people of Jerusalem. Tell them they have suffered long enough, and their sins are now forgiven. I have punished them in full for all their sins." 3 A voice cries out, "Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord! Clear the way in the desert for our God! 4 Fill every valley; level every mountain. The hills will become a plain, and the rough country will be made smooth. 5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it. The Lord himself has promised this." 6 A voice cries out, "Proclaim a message!" "What message shall I proclaim?" I ask. "Proclaim that all human beings are like grass; they last no longer than wild flowers. 7 Grass withers and flowers fade when the Lord sends the wind blowing over them. People are no more enduring than grass. 8 Yes, grass withers and flowers fade, but the word of our God endures forever." 9 Jerusalem, go up on a high mountain and proclaim the good news! Call out with a loud voice, Zion; announce the good news! Speak out and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah that their God is coming! 10 The Sovereign Lord is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued. 11 He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers.

7. Song: CH4 476 Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored

8. Sermon: Prepare the way Isaiah 40:1-11

"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. I am sure you all agree with me that everyone need comfort, don't we need comfort? People always try to comfort us in our trouble. They come to us, saying, "Don't worry; everything is all right! They may even say everything is going to be alright" I must say, such human comfort has no solid foundation because it does

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not rest on anything. But God's comfort rests on a solid foundation, which we read about in Isaiah 40. I am convinced that God alone gives us solid comfort.

Let me ask you this morning, when things go wrong, or perhaps when you are extremely low emotionally, things are dry, and ugly. What motivates you? For some music does something wonderful as it takes away the pain for a moment. Last week we lit the candle of hope. May be I should ask this, **What gives you hope for the future? Is it your kids? Your marriage? Your work? Food? Money? Your college degree? Your next vacation?** All the things I mentioned are here one day and gone the next.

And yet the prophet Isaiah tells us where comfort comes from. He says to us, just like he said to the people of his own day, and this is what he says, true comfort is a gift from a King — a King who rules the world with power and shepherds his people with love. And that King, of course, is Jesus Christ.

Let me say few things for our benefit in reading the Prophet Isaiah. The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah deal with Israel's sin and God's subsequent judgment, ending in Judah's exile to Babylon in 586 Before Christ. But chapters 40 through 66 of Isaiah deal with God's comforting of his people. This section speaks, first, about the return of the exiles from Babylon. But it also speaks about the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and concludes prophecies about his second coming. I hope this is enough background to encourage you to read the book.

The sixteenth-century Catechism speaks of this most important issue of true comfort in its first question and answer:

Q1. What is your only comfort in life and death?

A. That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me...

God alone can bring comfort to miserable sinners like us, therefore let us prepare our hearts for this! How do we get ready?

Here is a reminder that we need to keep at the back of our mind. **What is the basis for the comfort God promises in Isaiah 40?** In verse 1 we read, "Comfort, comfort my people." The objects of God's comfort are his people. Though we are sinners, God calls us "my people." This is covenant language which we find throughout the Bible: "I am your God and you are my people."

Because we are God's covenant people, God will comfort us. So in verse 2 Isaiah is told, "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem." In Hebrew it is translated **"speak to the heart of Jerusalem."** When a mother speaks to her crying child, her words go straight into the child's heart so that he stops crying and he is strengthened. In the same way, God ministers his love to our hearts through his prophets. As we receive comfort from the gospel, we are to comfort others by proclaiming the good news to them. True comfort comes only through proclamation of the good news that God saves sinners through Jesus Christ.

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The 2nd reason or Basis for God's Comfort: The Word of God is eternal. Fellow human beings will go so far in trying to comfort us, but the word of God can go further. In Isaiah 40:6-8 we read: **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. 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.'**

God's word endures forever; thus, we can put our trust in it and receive solid comfort from it. Balaam declared in Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?" If we trust in human words, we will be disappointed time and again. But God's solid promise found in his eternal word will bear us up both in life and in death.

As we said before, we must prepare the way of the Lord. How do we do it? By humbling ourselves. The man who cries out, "Have mercy upon me, a sinner!" will be comforted.

3rd reason why we can anticipate this comfort is this. In Isaiah 40:9-10 we find these words, **"Jerusalem, go up on a high mountain and proclaim the good news! Call out with a loud voice, Zion; announce the good news! Speak out and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah that their God is coming! The Sovereign Lord is coming to rule with power, bringing with him the people he has rescued."**

The message here is this, Christians in 2020, **Behold your God!"** We receive solid comfort when we focus on God rather than ourselves. The truth is, we feel most miserable when we look at ourselves. Looking within can only frighten us because, as the Bible says, in every way the thoughts of man's heart is only evil all the time. Additionally, if we put our trust in other human beings, we will only become depressed. One man may say, "I love you," but the next moment he/she dies, and his/her promise of love means nothing. Another person may say he loves you only to take advantage of you. We cannot look to ourselves or to others for comfort.

What, then, should we do? We must look to God. Only God can give us solid comfort. In fact, here Isaiah is saying that God is coming with the specific purpose of comforting us.

The last point this morning is this, The basis of God's comfort to us is based on nothing except this; God is our Good Shepherd. We read these beautiful words in verse 11, **" He will take care of his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs together and carry them in his arms; he will gently lead their mothers."**

God is our good shepherd, one who is greater than David in his shepherding care of his people. Jesus, "I lay down my life for my sheep."

This advent may we remember this, "He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young ones." This speaks of the great intimacy of divine love. God's shepherding care is full of comfort for all his flock. Because the Lord is our shepherd, we shall lack nothing. Surely that should comfort miserable people like us!

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Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.

God has given his people comfort through Jesus Christ that will keep us now and always. Amen.

9. Prayer for self and others.

Holy God, through your prophets you have promised us a world where justice and mercy would reign, where knowledge and understanding would prevail, and where the poor and the weak would be the recipients of compassion and not scorn. You sent Christ to give us the vision of this kind of Kingdom, then gave us the Holy Spirit within us that we might work to make a way for it in our world. As we give our gifts this morning, may you dedicate them and us to help bring about a world where your love, mercy, and grace reign supreme.

God of all things, God of the Church, God of the nation, God of the world, God of every individual, we believe that if you are the God of all, then you will listen to all. So in that blessed assurance, we come to you with our prayers. We offer you our all – in words and in silence – holding nothing back, in the belief that you will hear our prayers and answer beyond our expectations. In your wisdom, in your love for all, hear the prayers of your humble people.

Hear our prayers for your Church Father. Heal our divisions in love and peace. Grant us strength to witness as we should. Give us the grace to offer your love where it is most needed. Give us the assurance that when we hold high the lamp of truth, the light of compassion, the beacon of hope, we will bring your light to all the world.

Hear our prayers for the Nation, this land of history and hope, of privilege and passion, of welcome and witness. Raise up those who will be role-models for our children, who will be leaders of our people, who will be holders of the baton of truth and justice which we will pass on to them.

Hear our prayers for the world in which we are set, with all its tension and striving, all its brokenness and deep concerns. Where there is war, may your peace descend. Where there is inequality, may your justice prevail. Where there is poverty, may your call to share be heeded. Where there is pain, may your healing bring a soothing balm. Where there is hopelessness, may your truth sustain.

Hear our prayers for those who are in need, those whom we carry in our hearts, not only in this place but in every waking moment of our daily living. And in our silence, we offer you the names and faces, the places and circumstances of those we love.

Silence...

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God of all things, Loving Father, we rejoice in the Communion of Saints, those known and unknown to us, who, together with us now in the one Kingdom of your love, bring you all that is needed of praise and prayer. We give thanks for them, as one day, we pray, others will give thanks for us. For all this we pray through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

10. Closing song hymn 334 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces the Lord is nigh, awake and hearken for he brings glad tidings of the King of Kings

12. Benediction.

As we go into this week, may we prepare the way of the Lord, making straight the paths that lead to God, in our hearts and souls, through our words and actions, by our choices and decisions. May we go as God's beloved, filled with the Holy Spirit. The blessing of God the Father, son and Holy Spirit be with you all Amen.