

6/12/2020 Reflection 1 ***Comfort, comfort my people, says the Lord*** Isaiah 40:1-11; Mk 1:1-8

Hygge (pronounced *hoo-ga*) is a Danish word meaning *comfort, contentment & cherishing the simple things in life* – something we could all do with in this terrible year. ***Comfort my people, God says – far more than*** an infant's comfort blanket or cuddly toy to hug and suck or even *hygge* -log fires, mulled wine and Classic FM – **but comfort of the living God.**

For the former people of Jerusalem, exiled, stuck, feeling punished and abandoned by God without hope - as for many people today, alone, isolated, weary, fed up, cut off from the company of those who matter most and our neighbours, fearing for health and livelihoods and the future of the Church in our land, Isaiah was given a message to pass on: the Lord will set His people free from all that currently enslaves or restricts them and will bring His people home, He will forgive their sins, He will restore and lift up; the glory of the Lord will be revealed for all the world and all will see it. **The Lord is with us like the Good Shepherd for His flock - to gather and carry close to His heart.**

John the Baptist revived this message for the God's people to be ready and make space to be able to receive Jesus the Christ 2000 years ago. John prepared the ground by what he did and what he said. He called on people **whatever** their learning, wealth or religious heritage, to humble themselves and to repent, to turn away from all they knew denied or dishonoured God, in order to receive and recognise Christ. *Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face...* goes the old chorus. Today, will we recognise God's presence with us in the foggy gloom of our current uncertainties and fears?

Comfort, comfort God's people. Isaiah chapter 2 had told of God's anguish and anger. Verse 5 of that chapter says, ***"Come descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord"*** but then continues, *"The Lord abandoned His people because they no longer lived as God's people....* What about our own society today? – easy acceptance of fake news and of any religion that doesn't involve commitment to the Lord, the over-importance given to wealth, the excessive influence given to big business.

No modern nation is chosen by God in the way that Israel was, but there a challenge to the Church today to dare to be different from the ungodly values of our world today.

Good news – “tidings of comfort and Joy” – we used to be able to sing together in the Christmas Carol, echoing the message of the angels to the shepherds the night Jesus was born (Luke 2:10) but adding comfort. **But just what is the comfort from the Lord we can know and share as we get near to Christmas?**

- 1) The biblical words, translated in English as *com-fort* or *con-solation*, have in their Latin roots – **with** and **strength** or **with the lonely**. Christmas brings the good news of God not remote or uncaring but **Immanuel**, God present **with us** in our situations to give us the strength and help we need.
- 2) Isaiah 9: 6 – *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given....and He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*
“ That word **counsellor** or **comforter** was the same word used by Jesus of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises each of us as we trust in Him. An alongside God, present with us and living within us to support, team and guide.
- 3) **It is good news not just for God’s ancient people of Israel but for all.** John 1:10 records, to all who did receive Him, who believe in His name, he gave the right to become children of God. And in John 3:16, John records Jesus telling Nicodemus, *God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son that **whosoever** believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

In Christ, God’s comfort - God’s living presence, life and love - is offered to each one of us. As we share in the bread and wine as a reminder of our shared dependence on all Christ has brought us, may we know His comfort, joy and peace.

Reflection 2 Advent Prayers, Blessing and Reflection

As we continue to wait for a return to the ways things were,
there is no better time than Advent to reflect on our own lives
and to give thanks for the moments of comfort that the Lord offers to us in this trying time.
We wait for the coming of Jesus, *Come thou long expected Jesus born to set Thy people free.*
Let us pray: Come Lord Jesus, do not delay. Come we pray to give new courage to Your
people who trust in Your love. By your coming, raise us to share in the joy of Your kingdom
on earth & in heaven where You live & reign with Father & the Holy Spirit, one God for ever
& ever. Amen

Words of God through the prophet Isaiah bringing words of comfort to the exiled people of
God two and a half millennia ago, ***“Comfort , O comfort my people!”***
Words of comfort and of hope offered by God to a nation, a people, who found themselves
stuck in a situation where they saw no hope, no way out. God’s people then were stuck in
exile living a life of despair and of misery and were longing to a return to the way things used
to be, hoping for freedom. It is the wilderness of despair and hopelessness that God speaks.
A promise is given that if God’s people prepare their hearts by turning away from themselves
to God, God will dwell with them. He will redeem them from the hand of their enemies and
will gently uphold and guide them to safety, as a Shepherd leads his flock.

This vision of hope and comfort was not just for ancient Jerusalem but for all people. This
promise is extended to all who find themselves in times of difficulty or uncomfortable
situations. This God who made a bond of love with Abraham is the same God today and
always. It is a comfort to know that God is always at our side, with us, whatever we are going
through. The prophet Isaiah brought much needed words of glad tidings to God’s people in
exile. How can we bring words and actions of comfort to those struggling to cope during this
time of pandemic, the lonely, the bereaved, the abused, the overworked? How can we create
places of comfort for those in emotional and spiritual exile? Let us ask the God of all comfort
to prepare our hearts this Advent to receive Him afresh so that God might dwell with us and
those in our community in desperate need of freedom?

Prayers:

God all comfort, we cry out to you in our time of need as we prepare to face continuing
limitations on our personal freedoms, we offer you our frustrations, our fears and our failures
as we cast these burdens before You.

God of tender loving kindness, our shepherd and our friend,
make Your presence known to all who are suffering, for those living alone, for those who
have lost loved ones, for the stressed and the anxious, for the ill-treated and the oppressed.
Gather them in your loving arms and guide them to safety.

God of strength and hope, as we wait for Your glory to be revealed in the coming of your
Son, give us hearts and minds in service of Your people that we might become places of
comfort to the least, to the last and the lost. Amen.

May the Lord be above to bless you;
. below you to support you;
. before you to guide you;
.. behind you to protect you;
.. within you to strengthen you;
. and beside you, to comfort you,
. this day and for evermore.