

IN NOMINE JESU

## COMFORT, O MY PEOPLE

Hear again the Word of the Lord that brings joy to His Church:

*"Comfort, comfort, O My people," says Elohim.*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

This is the Sunday when the record of the voice of the last prophet of the Old Testament is recalled. He who was sent into the world by God to herald the coming King has cried out. What did he cry?

*"In the desert prepare way of YHWH, make straight in desert highway for our Elohim; Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, uneven ground shall be level and rough place to plain."*

He cried out the words of the prophet before, the great Isaiah, whom God used to perform many great and awesome miracles in the sight of His people. This last crier of the Old Testament called out to those who were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death so that they would prepare the royal highway.

The imagery in that cry was real to those who were familiar with the preparations made for the arrival and entrance of a conquering king. Such preparations included sending laborers out to the roads on which he was soon to travel. There, workers would prepared the way so that it would be smooth traveling for the king - to honor him, and to keep him from stumbling or laboring in his entrance. They went out to "smooth the way." (Think of this as you hear of preparations that will be made for the entrance of the new American President into the capitol city for his inauguration day. Everything is to be made right, to be beautified, to honor the coming leader of the free world).

When the last Old Testament prophet prepared the way of the Lord, he called the people of Jerusalem to repentance. He, by his message of the Law that convicts and condemns, called them to turn from sin, to be baptized into repentance, in order that they would be prepared for repentance when the king came to them. He cried out:

*“In the desert prepare way of YHWH, make straight in desert highway for our Elohim; Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, uneven ground shall be level and rough place to plain.”*

Yes, that is a proclamation of repentance. And it is a call for preparation for a coming king of power and might. It should be no mystery to us who hear it today that the very man who heralded the message of preparation may have been confused at the entrance of the King. Sitting in his dank prison, John surely wondered at the apparent contradiction between his words of preparation for the way of the mighty king, and Jesus’ coming – on foot, with no angel entourage, no mighty war steeds – just a confession that his meeting John at the river was necessary to fulfill all righteousness, and the beginning of an itinerant ministry proclaiming good news through words, healings, cleansings, and the raising of the dead.

Expectations are being challenged today in these readings. The message of Isaiah, taken out of context, would, and does, lead many to a misunderstanding of the Good News. That is, that the way that was to be prepared for the Deliverer of God’s people was to take place in their hearts – the very center of their beings. That is why the message of joy for this third week of Advent, when the rose color of the Savior breaks into the purple of mourning and royalty begins with:

*“Comfort, comfort, O My people,” says Elohim.*

How is the comfort to come?

God tells the prophet: *Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry to her,*

*“Thus is ended her warfare; thus is pardoned her iniquity; thus she has received from (the) Hand of YHWH double for all her sins.”*

That message was first given to the prophet before the complete and utter destruction of the whole divided kingdom. Those who had been spared in the fall of the North in 722 BC, would fall in 586 BC. Their Temple would be destroyed, they would be deported, and their captivity would last for years. Various conquerors would invade their lands – the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Romans – and the people and the land would wait for redemption.

Now, in the Last Old Testament prophet’s cry, the promise given through Isaiah is declared as upon them. Hundreds of years have passed. Not one prophet, since Malachi over 400 years ago, they reckoned, has promised deliverance. Now this one man has come into the wilderness with all the marks of a prophet. He looks like a prophet – his manner of dress; he acts like a prophet – his manner of life; he speaks like a true prophet – his message of baptism into repentance; and for the astute among the people – he is punished like a prophet!

Then, where is the fulfillment of the promises he has delivered, he asks himself? His words of comfort, of joy, surely seem hollow as he awaits his mortal end in Herod’s dungeon –

*“Thus is ended her warfare; thus is pardoned her iniquity; thus she has received from (the) Hand of YHWH double for all her sins.”*

He who witnessed the heavens opening and the Spirit descend upon Jesus; he who heard the Father’s Voice declare that One to be His beloved Son; wonders why the people have not been liberated. How often have you felt his pain, wondered his doubts, as you suffered waiting for the Lord to deliver you from some evil of body, soul or mind? If even the prophets of God who had His immediate revelation doubted, how much more you do so, who have only the mediated revelation – the reports of the scriptures, the mysteries of the altar and font?

Doubt is part of the human condition. It is ours on account of our fallen nature. Christians too, ask ourselves the question from Paradise now lost – “Did God really say?”

Those times are when you, dear ones in Christ, need to hear again the prophet’s call –

*“In the desert prepare way of YHWH, make straight in desert highway for our Elohim;*

*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, uneven ground shall be level and rough place to plain.”*

That is, don’t just sorrow over your sins but turn from them. Confess your sins, let the Word level the hills and valleys of your inner being, for the King is coming. The banner hangs there with that reminder: Prepare the Way of the Lord. Look to your mortal end, know your earthly fate:

*“All the flesh (is) grass; and all the beauty of it (is) like (a) flower of the field;”*

*The grass withers, (the) flower fades, thus (the) breath of YHWH blows on it – surely the people (is as) the grass.*

*The grass withers, (the) flower fades, but (the) Word of our Elohim will stand forever!”*

The prophet cries out to the people of God that they may know their end – that like the grass of the field in the winter, they, you, will dry up and die. Turn, repent, and believe in that which gives you the power to live again - *(the) Word of our Elohim will stand forever!*

That is, do not just sorrow, or even will to turn from your sins, but be turned because you know that your end is already assured. Right now, in Christ, hear these words that give you the power of Almighty God to daily turn from sin and walk in newness of life:

*“Comfort, comfort, O My people,” says Elohim.*

*“Thus is ended (your) warfare; thus is pardoned (your) iniquity; thus (you) have received from (the) Hand of YHWH double for all (your) sins.”*

When did all that begin? It began when you first believed in the message of the prophets, that the Christ would come to hearts prepared by the Law, and turn them with the Gospel. That is, when His entrance into the Holy City was to die – for you, for all the sins of the world – your debts to God were paid in full, your sins forgiven.

It is to that Good News that we who so often sit in the dark prison house of sin and worldly suffering on account of the good confession are called to turn. The Gospel – that is most clearly the horrible death of Christ who was baptized to bear your sins – the Gospel is that which God has deemed to be His instrument of power to deliver you from sin’s captivity, no matter what your earthly life may yield.

You have been freed from sin, the devil, and hell itself! That means you may join, as we have done so already, your voices in song – the songs of those who have died in the faith are still echoed here – to declare to those who still need to turn from sin:

*“Behold your Adonai! YHWH comes in might and His Arm rules for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense is before Him.”*

In the midst of struggle, sorrow, strife, persecution for the good confession, you are free to have joy. Rejoice, for you may behold your God – in this image of victory, the spoils lifted high in the image of the lifeless and bloody Christ! Rejoice, for you may behold your God – in the Word of His coming to vanquish sin, the fallen creation, your own sinful flesh, and the one who would accuse you! Rejoice, for you may behold your God – in forgiveness pronounced upon you! Rejoice, for you may behold your God – in forgiveness and life in, with and under the Bread and Wine! Here are His rewards – forgiveness, life and salvation, in the means He has chosen to deliver them.

*“Comfort, comfort, O My people,” says Elohim, For this time is upon us, when,*

*Like (a) shepherd, He will feed His flock; in His arms He will gather (the) lambs; and in His breast He will carry (them), and gently lead (those who are) with young.*

Amen, Come Lord Jesus.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

*Advent III (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)*

Isaiah 40:1-11; I Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 11:2-10

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

**Translation, second draft: OT: Isaiah 40:1-11**

*Comfort, comfort, O My people, says Elohim.*

*Word upon the heart to Jerusalem, and cry to her, "thus ended her warfare; thus pardoned her iniquity; thus she has received from (the) Hand of YHWH double for all her sins."*

*Voice cries: "In the desert prepare way of YHWH, make straight in desert highway for our Elohim;*

*Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, uneven ground shall be level and rough place to plain."*

*Voice says, "Cry!" And I say, "What shall I cry?"*

*"All the flesh – grass; and all the beauty like flower of the field;"*

*Withers the grass, fades flower, thus breath of YHWH blows on it – surely the grass the people.*

*Withers the grass, fades flower, but Word of our Elohim will stand forever!"*

*Every high mountain get up to herald good things to Zion: lift up in strength your voice, herald of good news to Jerusalem – "Lift up! Fear not," you say to cities of Judah, "Behold, Your YHWH!"*

*"Behold your Adonai YHWH in might comes and His Arm rules for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense is before Him."*

*Like shepherd, His flock He will feed; in His arms He will gather lambs; and in His breast He will carry the young, and gently lead.*

**Luther's Works:**

**Isaiah 40:6**

**249.70** *We do not put marriage and virginity on the same level, but neither virginity nor marriage merits justification.*

<sup>70</sup> *With false arguments like these they defend a wicked and immoral law. With reasons like these they persuade the princes to take a position contrary to the judgment of God, who will call them to account for breaking up marriages and torturing and killing priests. Have no doubt that as the blood of Abel cried out in death (Gen. 4:10), so the blood of the many innocent victims of their rage will also cry out. God will avenge this cruelty. Then you will see the emptiness of our opponents' arguments and understand that in the judgment of God no perversion of God's Word will stand, as Isaiah says (40:6), "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field."<sup>1</sup>*

**Isaiah 40:6-7**

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<sup>1</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia

**158.329** *“All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it”; that is, the flesh and the righteousness of the flesh cannot stand the judgment of God.*<sup>2</sup>

**Isaiah 40:10**

**562.23** *Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction. The descendants of the holy patriarchs, like the patriarchs themselves, constantly reminded themselves not only how man in the beginning was created righteous and holy by God and through the deceit of the serpent transgressed God’s laws, became a sinner, corrupted himself and all his descendants, and plunged them into death and eternal damnation, but also revived their courage and comforted themselves with the proclamation of the woman’s seed, who would bruise the serpent’s head;<sup>1</sup> likewise, of the seed of Abraham, but whom all nations should be blessed;<sup>2</sup> likewise, of David’s son, who should restore the kingdom of Israel and be a light to the nations,<sup>3</sup> “who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and with whose stripes we are healed.”<sup>43</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia

1 Gen. 3:15.

2 Gen. 22:18; 28:14.

3 Ps. 110:1; Isa. 40:10; 49:6.

4 Isa. 53:5.

<sup>3</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia