

December 7, 2014
Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Isaiah 40:1–11

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Isaiah 40:1–11 (ESV)

¹ Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." ⁶ A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹ Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Pardon, providence, promise, and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen.

That's not what you're used to hearing at the opening of a sermon, is it? But you know what? That's exactly what today's Old Testament reading says. That is what Isaiah was saying to the children of God in his day and that's what he's saying to us today – pardon, providence, promise, and peace.

However, we'll miss the real impact of Isaiah's message if we begin our examination of this text here in the 40th chapter. To understand the voice of pardon, the voice of providence, the voice of promise, and the voice of peace, we must look at all of Isaiah.

First, let's look at the book itself. Isaiah has 66 chapters, just like the Bible has 66 books. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah tell the story of the unfaithfulness of Israel. How they had indulged in idolatry, injustice, and immorality. How they had abused and killed the prophets of the Lord. How they had turned to themselves instead of turning to God, and how ripe they were for punishment.

Interspersed with this list of sins and warnings of judgment, woven through these 39 chapters, are promises of redemption *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)*

So we have 39 chapters of Isaiah telling of sin, warning of God's wrath, and promising a Savior. Just like the 39 books of the Old Testament.

So what about the last 27 chapters of Isaiah?

There God tells how He'll restore His wayward people, how He'll redeem them from their sins against Him, and how He will draw them to Himself.

These 27 chapters deal with salvation and restoration - just like the 27 books of the New Testament.

So now, let's look at the text. After 39 chapters of God expounding on the sins of the people, we come to the first portion of today's Old Testament reading –

the voice of pardon.

God tells the prophet to comfort His people – to speak tenderly to Jerusalem. To speak tenderly doesn't mean to speak to Jerusalem's ears but speak to her heart.

To softly stroke Jerusalem's heart with tender words of comfort. To assure her that the debt of her sin has been paid because she has received a double portion of grace from God's hand.

So, with the pardon of sin in place, Jerusalem was ready to hear **the voice of providence**. Jerusalem was ready to hear how God would provide.

God was sending His Ambassador. But this wasn't just an ordinary ambassador. This was the Lord Himself.

The cry goes out: "...*Prepare the way of the Lord!*" (Is 40:3 ESV).

The providence of the Lord was at hand. God would provide for His people what they couldn't provide for themselves – salvation. God was about to reveal the physical presence of His Glory for all the world to see.

Now, even though, the people have heard pardon and the people have heard providence, how do they know this is true?

The assurance of truth is declared by **the voice of promise**.

God tells the prophet to cry out and the prophet asks: *“What shall I cry?”*

God tells the prophet to tell His people that: *All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field... The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.* (Is 40:6-8 ESV).

So how solid is the voice of promise – as solid as the God who made the promise. His promise is as solid as the ground you stand on, and why not He made that, too.

So the voice of pardon, the voice of providence, and the voice of promise all lead, quite naturally, to **the voice of peace.**

How much more peace could Jerusalem have than to know her sins were forgiven, to know that her God, Himself, would be her Savior, and to know these promises are as true and faithful as He is true and faithful.

The voice of peace cries out: *“Behold your God!”*¹⁰ *Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.*¹¹ *He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.”* Isaiah 40:9–11 (ESV)

It’s a beautiful statement that God tells through Isaiah. It’s the telling of a loving God. It’s the telling of a God who knew the sinfulness of His people, and loved them anyway.

A God who would take on a debt that wasn’t His so He could pay the price His beloved people couldn’t afford.

It’s a story of pardon, a story of providence, a story of promise, and a story of peace for Jerusalem.

But what about you?

Does this Word from the prophet speak to you, personally?

Now it may not completely apply to you because, after all, the Israelites did some pretty knuckle-headed things. I mean, just think about it. They knew exactly who the true God was and they turned to worshipping idols anyway. But you'd never do that, would you?

You'd never put something else ahead of God,would you?

Of course, little things like cutting back on your offering to afford that new car or missing worship on Sunday for an occasional hunting or fishing trip, that's not like worshipping idols, is it?

That's not the same as putting something else ahead of God.

Worrying and fretting over how you're going to make ends meet, that's not the same as not trusting God with your whole heart.

Supporting pro-choice abortion laws isn't an injustice because the Supreme Court says that the unborn don't have rights so they can't be violated. Of course, that Supreme Court isn't the "SUPREME COURT."

Not speaking out against the pornography that flows through our book stores, our televisions, and our theaters like open sewers isn't the same as immorality because those people are guaranteed freedom of speech.

Besides, you don't indulge in that yourself so what other people do is their business.

And, oh yes, the Israelites beat and killed God's prophets. You'd never do that to a pastor, would you? You might have a few chosen remarks about his last sermon or something he said that didn't set well with you, but you'd never hurt him, physically anyway.

Should I go on, or are you getting the picture? There are thousands of ways to sin. Are you guilty of any of them? If you are, and we all are, there's good news for you. Your loving God has told the prophet Isaiah to comfort you.

He told Isaiah to speak tenderly to you – to gently stroke your heart with soothing words of pardon.

Out of the depths of His love, your God has pardoned your sins.

Not because of who you are or anything you have done, but because, in His providence, He has provided His Son as your Savior.

And the price of your sin wasn't cheap.

To pay the price of your sin God's Son had to take on human form.

He had to live a perfect life in an imperfect world.

He had to drag a cross up a garbage heap, spill holy blood,and die a sinner's death.

Then to show that there's no power greater than Him, your Savior rose from the grave to defeat the final enemy, death.

Now, can you be sure all this is sufficient to cover your sin, all your sin?

Absolutely. You have the voice of promise from God. God set the price for sin, and God paid the price for sin. For you, for your neighbor, for the whole world for all time!!!

You are forgiven and you have His word on it, and the word of God stands forever.

So, now you're at peace, knowing that when you were baptized you were joined with Christ in His death and His resurrection. That means you were made righteous through His righteousness. You're at peace knowing that every time you confess and repent of your sins to God, when you admit who you are and who he is, you receive His forgiveness.

You're at peace knowing that each time you come to the Lord's Table you partake in His holy body and blood which bought your forgiveness.

Now, you can truly hear the prophet as he speaks forgiveness to you in the voice of **pardon**. As he speaks salvation to you in the voice of **providence**. As he speaks assurance to you in the voice of **promise**. And as he speaks comfort to you in the voice of **peace**. And may that peace which your Heavenly Father has provided for you, that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God Alone be the glory

“Warnings, Judgments ... and Blessings”

Isaiah 40:1–11

1. Pardon.
2. Providence.
3. Promise.
4. Peace