

The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two (BCP p. 355)
(The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is available online at www.bcponline.org/)
Second Sunday in Advent: December 6, 2020

The Sermon: Rev. Carol Ruthven

Come Lord Jesus

“Comfort, O comfort my people,” says your God.” Isaiah 40:1

Today on this second Sunday of Advent, we mark the passing of time in this season by lighting two candles. Our Jewish neighbors will light the candles of the menorah to mark the beginning of Chanukah (Hanukkah) at sundown on Thursday. The light of the seven candles of the menorah symbolize hope in the world. As Christians we light the candles of our Advent wreath at church and in our homes to symbolize the coming of Christ into the darkness of the world. The lit candles remind us that light will always overcome darkness. If a single small candle can light up an entire room of darkness, imagine how much more the Light of Christ pierces the darkness. When it is cold and dark outside, I like to light a candle where I work to remind myself that Christ is always with us wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

When I am praying privately, I often begin or end my prayer by saying, “Come Lord Jesus.” Perhaps more than ever, we are living in a time when we are seeking the comfort of God. This was also true for the Jewish ancestors of Jesus. Sometime between 500 or 600 years before Jesus was born, the army of the Babylonian Empire had invaded Judah. The temple and much of the great city of Jerusalem was destroyed, land was taken away, and the leaders of the Jewish people were captured and deported to Babylon.ⁱ The Babylonians occupied the land for fifty years. They enacted laws that undermined the foundations of the Jewish people, their culture and their faith.

Today’s reading from Second Isaiah was written decades after that devastating invasion. The words were intended to bring hope to the exiled Jewish people, who had been crushed and defeated. The writer imagined what it might be like to have the nation of Judah restored, Jerusalem rebuilt, and the people who had been exiled in Babylon reunited in Zion. The writer offered words of hope. “Comfort, O comfort my people, says

your God” are the famous words of healing balm spoken to soothe the souls of God’s people, who were exiled and suffering in Babylon.”ⁱⁱ

There are millions of people in America and around the world, who feel that they are living in a time of darkness and uncertainty, particularly now in the midst of the rapid spread of the corona virus and its devastating impact. Many people feel that they are being exiled in their homes. Whether it was thousands of years ago in Babylon or today in America, while people wait for better times, they long for hope and to be comforted by God. Throughout time when God’s people find themselves in desolate and dark places and circumstances, God’s word remains unchanging and is ever present.ⁱⁱⁱ “The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.” (Isa. 40:8) When it seems that everything else has failed, God’s word endures and God provides a way for God’s people to come home and be comforted.^{iv}

Throughout our lives we experience times of darkness and light. Throughout history, there are times when God’s people have been faithful and other times when they have been unfaithful and turned away from God’s teaching. The words of Isaiah come to each generation of God’s people to remind them that seeing the light is not a one-time event. God promises, over and over again, to provide a way out of times of suffering, despair and darkness.^v

Light always comes in the morning to remind us to be faithful to God, even in the darkest and most difficult times.^{vi} I am especially reminded of this each time I am with the Episcopal nuns of the Community of the Transfiguration in Cincinnati. Every morning at 7 A.M. the sisters are in the oratory to pray the first set of prayers in the Daily Office. Sitting in that beautiful oratory, the prayers begin in darkness and slowly but surely the light begins to appear and become brighter as each pray is said and each psalm is chanted. It is a deeply spiritual experience of the presence of the Light of Christ in our world. I invite you to rise early one morning, sit by a window and read the Morning Prayer service of [The Book of Common Prayer](#) and you can also experience the deep comfort of knowing the Christ is always present in our world.

In the coming days, think about how the Light of Christ might shine brightly through your actions to bring comfort to a child, a person living alone, an elderly person in a nursing home, a health-care worker, a friend or a neighbor. Let them know that you

are thinking about them and care deeply about them and their well-being. It is through such simple acts of loving-kindness that the Light of Christ is revealed in the world. No one today needs to live with anxiety and fear. We can each shine the light of Christ to show others a way forward out of the darkness and into a brighter and better future.

Let me close with the lovely words from the refrain of the hymn, “Jesus, the light of the world:

We’ll walk in the light, beautiful light.

Come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright.

Oh, shine all around us by day and by night.

Jesus, the light of the world.

Amen.^{vii}

ⁱ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 2008), Katheen M. O’Connor, Exegetical Perspective, p. 27.

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 40:1.

ⁱⁱⁱ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. Feasting on the Word, Year B, Vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 2008), Katheen M. O’Connor, Exegetical Perspective, p. 29.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v O Wisdom: Advent Devotions on the Names of Jesus (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, 2018), p. 77.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} https://hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_jesus_the