

Wednesday, December 16, 2020 – Advent Midweek III

“Advent Comfort”

Isaiah 40: 1-8

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace, mercy and peace be yours through God our Father and through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

When the word “comfort” hits your ear in December your first reflex is probably to think about sitting by the fire. Sipping a hot apple cider, wrapping yourself up in a blanket or a new sweater. You may have idyllic Christmas images running through your head, home and hearth, family and fun.

But this is not the comfort needed by Isaiah’s hearers. They endured desolation. He warned of a time to come when the people would be wrested away from their traditions and their community Israel was held captive in Babylon. The despair was more than your garden variety stuff, this would be community-wide trauma, this visceral groaning from the deepest part of your guts crying out for God to help – and yet they wither like parched grass and fade like flowers. And the help comes in the promise of a coming Savior but as Isaiah writes that help is centuries away.

Most years Advent is an afterthought for us – the pregame show to Christmas. We break out the decorations, hold our parties, bake our cookies, buy our gifts and get in the Christmas spirit. But have you ever noticed the minor key that runs through Advent? Literally it can be found in our music in worship. We omit singing the Hymn of Praise “Glory to God in the highest.” Yes, there’s hope – our Savior is coming again, and on this side of the Christ event Jesus has already come as a baby in Bethlehem but there’s also this “not yet” sense. There’s a penitential, mourning, grieving kind of thing going on in these challenging days of waiting for our Savior to come.

Our lives have prepared us to receive this Advent truth – things are not yet the way they are supposed to be – but Jesus is coming! Israel expected Jesus to come and everything to be happily ever after. But aside from some shepherds in the field hearing angels and Mary’s proclamation from an angel along with a few other events right around his birth, He went often unrecognized. He was born into suffering – in fact, He didn’t just join Israel in captivity. He took their place. Born in meager circumstances and placed in a feeding bin for cattle or

sheep, He traced Israel's steps. A ruler tried to assassinate him, much as Moses was by Pharaoh. Jesus fled to Egypt, literally, with his parents. He walked down into the River Jordan to be baptized into the sins that John had washed off the people of Israel. He was tempted in the wilderness 40 days and 40 nights, like the Israelites in the wilderness. He met ridicule and rejection as the prophets of old, and eventually betrayal and murder by his very own.

Where is there comfort to be had, as the grass withers and the flowers fade? In the Word of God. The Word made flesh, who made His dwelling among us. Not a mere visit. Not a vacation. Not a houseguest. A fellow-dweller. A dweller among us who takes on responsibility for the whole community. A denizen who devotes His very life to the ultimate act of public service. That's what the word liturgy means - leiturgia – an act of public service. This Word of God made flesh to dwell among us serves you and serves me by enduring everything, and more that we have endured in our Advent wilderness journey.

God has compassion. He comforts us – not with hot cider and a cozy fireplace but with the removal of our shame, the cleansing of our guilt, with the promise of tender words. "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."

This, this Advent mourning, this strange mix of grief and hope God speaks double the grace for all the sins of His people! Overflowing abundance of help and hope and love, forgiveness and restoration. However heartbroken this Advent or the overall Advent experience of life may find you, you have a Savior who endured desolation and isolation, rejection and upheaval, parched like withered grass and fading like a dying flower as He endured the cross and scorned its' shame.

He is coming soon! Comfort, comfort, my people, says our God. " ⁵And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. "

In Jesus' name, Amen.