

TAKE TIME OUT - Pastoral Retreat

Sunday Scriptures: 6th December 2020 Revd Janice Morgan

2nd Sunday in ADVENT – GOD’S WORD = Prophets

Isaiah 40:1-11 *The Lord Comes!*

¹Comfort, O comfort My people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. ³A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴Every 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. ⁵Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’ ⁶A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’ All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. ⁷The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. ⁸The grass withers, the flower fades; but the Word of our God will stand forever. ⁹Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” ¹⁰See the Lord God comes with might, and His arm rules for Him, and His recompense before Him. ¹¹He will feed His flock like a Shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Reflection: *The Lord Comes!*

Isaiah speaks of comfort and proclaims that Jerusalem has served her time of double penance for past sins. Time and time again we read in Scripture how the people of God depart from His Word and fall into sin. Yet, time and time again we read how God forgives, heals and restores by His grace and mercy. When reading Scriptures that promise God’s blessings we must take care to understand why they are being given. In this case it is God’s people settled in Jerusalem that He is specifically addressing. This is a case of corporate disobedience and the whole community have received double penalty and suffered long because of their sin. However, it is clear, by God’s promised blessings, that these people have repented of their wrongdoing, as a whole community, and accepted God’s discipline with good grace. The key to releasing the grace of God’s forgiveness is our repentance. When we engage in behaviour that goes against God’s Word, we dishonour Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This draws us away creating distance between ourselves and God, causing us to fall from grace. It is our behaviour, both individually and corporately, that cause us to suffer dire consequences. However, when we acknowledge our wrongdoing and repent we are drawn back into a right relationship with our heavenly Father once more. Such is the case with God’s people in Jerusalem at this time.

How often do we reflect on our own behaviour? How often do we reflect on our corporate behaviour as the body of Christ? When did we last repent before God of our sins?

The promise given to Isaiah is one of recompense, nurture and comfort. At this time, in these circumstances, we are in dire need of God’s grace, nurture and comfort. Perhaps it would be good to take stock and ask ourselves where God is in all the current confusion of pandemic, loss, division and chaos. God is always waiting for us to stop running around filling up our day doing stuff and be still and listen, why? Because it is the only way we will be able to hear His voice over the clamour of the world. Satan would have us kept busy, why? Because the busier we are the less likely we are to come to God and sit before Him in intimate companionship. Isaiah tells of a voice asking God’s people to prepare and make a straight path. Being still and giving space and time to God is the beginning of us doing that,

both individually and corporately. We are being asked to prepare for the presence of God and God is Truth. As a child growing up I believed without question that God knows everything, and still do! However, as a child I also believed that whenever I did something wrong God would tell my mother! So, I always thought it was better to tell her and face up to the consequences rather than wait for God to tell her and suffer greater punishment for not being honest. My father told me years later that they would never have known half the things I got up to if I had not told them!

How honest are we with each other? Does our life demonstrate the integrity of Christ? Do our words and actions honour the name of Jesus?

The Lord is watching us from dawn to dusk, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, waking and sleeping. God longs to find us living and behaving in accord with His Word, honouring His commands and following the example of Jesus. We are also being asked to make a 'straight path'. The opposite to straight is crooked, which suggests things done in secret, plans, plots and schemes conducted behind the scenes to corrupt Truth. These types of behaviour lack integrity and dishonour the name of the Lord. Therefore, we are being asked to expose what is not right with God and return the people to the straight and narrow path of His will and purpose. Isaiah is told to 'cry out' but he is not sure what to say and reflects only on what he can see and understand as a human being. Human beings tend to react according to what we see, hear, smell and taste. This is why it is vitally important to maintain a right relationship with God, for He sees from a different perspective to that of human beings. Love sometimes has to be tough in order to save souls. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit we can discern the Truth, as God sees it, and play our part in restoring the world's crooked ways into God's straight path.

How successful are we at proclaiming the presence of God? Does our own behaviour demonstrate His Spirit within us? Are we exercising the love of God among us?

Isaiah also prophesied the coming of God, 'Immanuel' (God with us) [Isaiah 7:10-14](#). An angel told Joseph to name God's Son 'Jesus' (the Lord saves) [Matthew 1:21](#). These are the solid promises of God's Word, the immovable rock on which we stand secure; everything else is temporary. Worldly view is like shifting sand; we can never be sure of what ground is underneath us. The Word of God calls for boldness of faith in proclaiming the powerful presence of God with us, in the world, woven into our circumstances. Let us not be like the story of Babushka, a Russian woman so busy doing things that when the wise men call and invite her to go with them she gives all sorts of excuses and promises to follow later. However, when she decides she has time to follow, it is too late, the path is lost and she never finds the Christ-Child, no matter how hard she tries. Let us instead stand firm in faith, holding on to the one permanent and infinite being who loves us, God our Father in heaven. It is futile to try and hide our wrongdoing because He saw us commit it! Be still and repent! God knows the messes that we get ourselves into and the Lord is with us to help us clean it up. Wow! Do not fear but rejoice in the grace, mercy and love of our heavenly Father. Comfort; divine comfort is at hand for the faithful. Remember His promises and 'prepare', like the faithful of Isaiah's time, make a 'straight path' and receive every blessing on earth and in heaven. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: A NEW COMMANDMENT can be found in SoF 22 & MP 1

A new commandment I give unto you,
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.

By this shall all folk know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.
By this shall all folk know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.

Poem: WAIT FOR THE LORD ©Janice Morgan-1998 Based on [Isaiah 40:31](#)

We pray, we wait, but nothing happens,
Just the passing of time,
Oh God how can we stay in this place of suffering and grime?
Our bodies ache, our hearts feel pain,
Our minds keep churning over,
The busy ways of evil rush to keep Satan in clover.

But those who wait upon the Lord
Shall renew their strength in Him,
They'll walk in light for all their days,
Even when their path grows dim.
They'll soar up as on eagles wings and fly the winds of heaven,
Where blessings upon blessings abound, seventy times seven.

The world is rushing on so quick, fast food, fast sin, fast living,
Such busyness is Satan's plan to keep us from God's giving.
We may gain wealth, we may gain pleasure,
But peace will not be found,
The faster we run, the more we find
We're losing precious ground.

But rest is found within the Lord, be patient and forbearing,
In Him we shall pursue our path not falling faint or fearing.
Then we shall run and never tire, the work will not be dreary,
For what we build and what we share
Will never make us weary.

Prayer: In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we ask You our Father, by the inspiration and awesome power of the Holy Spirit to help us 'prepare the way of the Lord' and to 'make straight in the desert a highway for our God'. **Amen!**
