

Message: Comfort My People
Sermon Series: Isaiah 40
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Isaiah 40: 1-5
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During the 4 Sundays of Advent, we focus on 1 chapter from the Bible – Isaiah 40. It has been called “The Gospel in the Old Testament.” Matthew, Mark and Luke all refer to this familiar text.

Quick Bible survey. After **Moses** led Israelites out of bondage in Israel, **Joshua** became their leader. The Bible’s 6th book, Joshua is about the conquest.

Judges follows. It is the “Dark Ages” of OT as “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” 1st Samuel follows. Samuel was a godly prophetic leader and voice. However, he did not transmit his spiritual values to his sons. The people rebelled against their corruption and demanded a king. Samuel warned them a king would take your sons and send them into war; would take your daughters and use them however he saw fit. A king would take the crops from your fields and consume your livestock. Samuel urged them to let God be their king and be unique from all the other nations. When they rejected his advice, God told Samuel that they had not rejected him as their leader but had rejected God. Their response: 1 Samuel 8:19-20 *But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. They said, "No! But there shall be a king over us that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us & go out before us & fight our battles.*

Like them, most of us want to be like everyone else and to have someone to fight our battles, too. We often vigorously pursue something believing if we get what we chase we will find peace only to discover the desired solution didn’t usher in the utopia we sought. Overall, the kings of Israel did not help the Jewish people. A few were good, some were good/bad, & others were evil. Prophets often spoke justice into the kings; usually unsuccessfully. This pattern seems true throughout history. Kings, emperors & military dictatorships have rarely served people well. Julius Caesar, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, Idi Amin, Pol Pot.

There is one who was different. During Thanksgiving weekend, let me share a little-known historical fact. The British surrendered in Oct 1791 @ Yorktown. It ended the Revolutionary War but it was 18 months before Britain signed the **Declaration of Peace**. During that interlude, Continental Congress + individual States decided not to pay soldiers their wages. There was talk of another revolution. People bitter/unhappy. During March 1793, some Continental

Army leaders approached GW. They wanted to make him the American “King George the 1st.” They thought they had the military support to pull it off. GW refused, but they wouldn’t take “no” for an answer. As he was talking to the conspirators, he tried to read a letter but said he needed his glasses because after 8 years in the field of battle not only had he gone **gray**, but he had almost gone **blind** in the service of his country. The gracious way he responded had a powerful emotional response on the men. Hardly a dry eye as he walked out of the tent, mounted a horse and rode away. It was a “non-event,” but it meant the American Revolution would not end like most all other revolutions – we would have no king. No one was more surprised by his reaction than his adversary, King George III of Great Britain:

“If he does that (rejects being King), he is the greatest man in the world.”

In **Isaiah Chapter 39**, we see the typical response of a proud, arrogant, showoff king – and this is a GOOD king. He took credit for the treasures in the Temple, rather than giving the glory to God. *Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the Lord. And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my days."* Isaiah’s prophecy that Israel would be taken into captivity into Babylon took place over a century later. Their kings & their people had failed to be the people God wanted them to be and judgment took place. **The people blamed God.** God’s response? He comes to Comfort them.

Isaiah 40:1-5

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare^[a] 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."*

Isaiah 40 begins a new section in the book. The focus shifts from facing Assyrians in 8th century BC to exiles in Babylon in 6th century BC. Chapters 1-39 = **confrontation**; but 40-66 = **consolation**. "Comfort...my people.... your God." Like John in Revelation looking into future, Isaiah was speaking to Judah & declaring God has not abandoned them. God is coming to save you. Let this hope fill your hearts.

Living in exile is often part of human experience. Exile separates us from our loved ones thru death, divorce & distance. It uproots us. Exile is suffering, abandonment, being lost & hopeless. It is when life wounds us. Sometimes we end up in exile bc we went there; at other times, others took us there, at other times, the exilic experience has no explanation. When living in exile, we need someone to comfort us and to speak words of tenderness to us.

Fred Rogers was someone who comforted a lot of people in the course of his life. I thought "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" would be more about Mr. Rogers, but it was about an unhappy investigative reporter, Lloyd, who drew the assignment to do a story about Fred Rogers. In trying to find dirt on Mr. Rogers, the inquisitor became the investigated. Mr. Rogers had a comforting presence for Lloyd. How Mr. Rogers did it was quite simple: I noted 4 things he did.

- 1.) He asked good Q's & got people to talk. He said, *"Anything mentionable is manageable."*
- 2.) He listened deeply + fully present with them.
- 3.) He sought redemption + reconciliation from the wounds of life. Fred Rogers had experienced them himself ("Fat Freddy" was a painful childhood taunt).
- 4.) He tried to improve. When Lloyd asked Fred's wife **"What's it like being married to a saint?"** she said saints don't like that name. He's not perfect. He gets angry. He works at it. He swims laps, reads his Bible and prays for others. Another technique he used is something we are going to use each Sunday during Advent. He's at a restaurant with Lloyd and he says, *"Take a minute & think about all the people who loved us into being. Just 1 minute of silence."*

Isaiah 40:1-5 tells us God is tender, that He cares, He is also just; that God's plan all along was to visit us and save us; that God is glorious, and His glory will be revealed thru Jesus. Jesus came to show us who the TRUE King is – and it's

not us. We can pretend WE are the big deal, but we know deep in our hearts that is bogus. We tend to rebel against His love and find ourselves incapable of redeeming our lives, finding comfort or comforting others. That is what Jesus' mission was – to comfort us – so that we might comfort others. If you've never given your life to Jesus, this is the day. He wants to comfort you.

2 Cor 1:3-7 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so thru Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.