

“Almighty and with us” Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 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. A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” 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. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. 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!” Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 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.

If there was nothing else in our today's reading from Isaiah 40, but only the first four words, that would still be the most beautiful message that we all need to hear. Comfort, comfort, my people!

These are the words of the Holy Spirit spoken through Isaiah the prophet seven centuries before Jesus' birth. Comfort, comfort my people! These words were initially addressed to the Israel as they were dwelling exiled in Babylon.

They lived in hostile pagan country. They had lost their holy city, their temple, their worship and their holy days where they could come in the Lord's presence and enjoy His blessings. Situation seemed without hope.

But then this unexpected message: “Comfort, comfort, my people!” That is, bring them the good news that their time of exile will soon be over, and that I will have mercy on them and will bring them home.

These words are also spoken to us, for similarly as the Israel was exiled in Babylon, we also live as strangers in this world, which is not our true home. We too long to see our Lord's glory, and we long to be with Him forever.

Comfort, comfort, my people! My people... Just dwell on these words for a while. How does God call us? My people. He calls you His people. And this is who you truly are.

Imagine how terrifying it would be to hear the opposite, – “you are not my people”. This is how God issued a warning through prophet Hosea to all those who reject His grace and trample on His invitation – “you are not my people”. These words bring death and destruction. They bring separation from God.

They give those, who don't want true God to be their God, what they want. Their will will happen. They will not see the friendly face of our gracious God.

But to you He says: "My people". These words contain the fulfillment of God's promise which we can hear in the Scriptures, both in the OT and in the NT again and again. "I will be your God and you will be my people."

Our God is God of community. He created us to live with Him. And we can read that at the end, when the Lord brings forth New Heavens and New Earth, we will be together, He will dwell among us, He will be our God and we will be His people, and we will know Him, closely and dearly, as our God.

And even now, while we are still separated by sin, we can get a foretaste of this togetherness. Our God has given us this setting, the Divine Service, and has promised that right here and right now He is with us – He is our God and we can know Him as our gracious God in His Word and in His Holy Meal.

See, you are here. You are God's people. He has chosen you and He Himself has handpicked you from this world, He has brought you here so that He could be your God, so that He could be with you and bless you.

Comfort, comfort, my people! This is, why we are here, to receive God's comfort in His own presence. And we all need it during these days. For the world in which we live begins to look stranger and stranger.

We can see it clearer and clearer that we don't belong here, that this is not our true home. Mighty of this world rage against the Lord. "We will create our own order. We can do whatever we want. We can rule this world with lies and deception, with fear and silencing the opposition."

This week we all find ourselves on another page in the history of this country and of our church. Australia along with quite a few other countries has despised and rejected the only institution that God established at the creation

That is, marriage as the union between one man and one woman for life, so that we could fulfill our responsibilities to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and take care of it.

As we witness the powerful of this world rebelling against God, and as we as God's people seem so insignificant and so powerless to stop this flood of lawlessness, we all need to hear God's comforting voice.

We are in a very similar situation as the Israel in Babylon. Mighty, pagan empire, worshiping their own gods, crushing all their opposition. Rebelling against the Creator... And then the Spirit of God speaks. Strange words...

"All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." Does it look like this today? Not at all. With our human

eyes we see the very opposite. The evil men flourish, and it looks like the Word of our God withers away.

At least this is what we can witness. Churches and individual Christians one after another abandoning the Word of God like a sinking ship, and pledging their allegiance to the idols and ideologies of this world. We see it around us, and we may be confused scared... what now?

Comfort my people! All flesh is grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows. But the Word of our God, – will stand forever. This is most certainly true. Where is Babylon now?

Where are all the mighty empires that succeed them? Where they are? They have withered away... But what still stands and will stand forever? That's right. The Word of our God.

Even the words of the Spirit spoken through Isaiah the prophet, more that two and half millennia ago still stand. We can read them today exactly as they were written by the prophet. They stand and will stand for the sake of God's people. For your sake.

The same fate awaits today's mighty powers, for they are nothing but grass. They will wither, but the Word will remain. Because the Word of God is not like our human words.

The Word of God was here in the beginning, He was with God, and He was God, and through Him everything was created, and in Him everything still holds together. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will remain.

Let me ask you, what kind of God would we need to bring us true comfort in this situation? Now, let's see what kind of God we have. When He sends Isaiah with the message of comfort, He also reveals what kind of God He is.

“Behold your God!” Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. [and then] 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.”

Did you notice? How does God reveal Himself? Did you see these two dimensions in His revelation? He comes with might, His arm rules, His reward is with Him, He recompense before Him. What kind of picture is this?

Almighty, holy, unstoppable force that brings forth judgement and justice, the Creator who holds the whole Universe in His palm. We need this one. We need this God whom we can trust.

We need to know that He is in control. That even the hairs of our heads are all numbered. And He will restore the justice, and He will destroy the evil. One day He will speak again, every eye will see Him, every knee will bow before Him,

His enemies will be speechless and will tremble in fear. The He will fulfill all His promises. We need this God to comfort us.

But, is it enough? Is it enough that we have God who is in control? So powerful, so strong, but also, so distant, so fearsome. How could we, sinful creatures, approach Him? For we don't deserve His mercy, we deserve His wrath.

This is where the other dimension of our God's nature comes in. "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."

What kind of picture is this? Very different. He will tend His flock. He will gather the lambs in His arms. He will carry them in His bosom. What picture is this? Compassionate, loving, gentle God who is close to each one of you.

God who is with us. God who "a bruised reed will not break, and a faintly burning wick will not quench." (Isa 42:3) God who will carry you in His bosom. This is our God. This is what He does for all His people. This is how He comforts us. He is closer to you than you could ever imagine.

And we need this God so much. And the world needs Him. There is a riot, a revolution going on in our society. A rebellion against the Creator. And where there is a revolution, there are victims.

I am talking about those many people who have chosen to reject true God and to ignore His will for our lives. Now they are hurt and wounded by this rebellion against God. I am talking about broken hearts and broken relationships. About people who don't now anymore what marriage is and how to live in it.

I am talking about many who are deceived into believing that embracing any desire of our perverted hearts will bring them happiness. You can see these people all around us and among us as well.

They are broken by following the father of all lies, for even if he disguises as an angel of light, even if he comes promising fun and freedom, and happiness, he comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy.

He has stolen their joy and freedom, he has killed their happiness and trust in people, he has destroyed their relationships and their hope in anything good. So often they are left without any comfort.

All those many people who have been deceive, broken and are now cast aside, they need our God, they need our loving and merciful God and Savior Jesus Christ. They need to hear our God saying to them: "I want to be your God."

"I want to comfort you. I want to hold you in my bosom. I want to care for you, and want to protect you, and want to heal you, and want you to know how precious you are to me. I want to be your God and I want you to be my people."

They all need Him. And we have exactly this God. Almighty and just. Our Father in heaven. Nothing is out of His control. His children are safe with Him.

But He is also God with us, the Son of God, our brother, Jesus Christ. He will not turn away anyone, who comes to Him. He will embrace the broken, He will wash the unclean. He will bring comfort to all His people.

For now, as we go on with our lives in this pagan world, that rages against the One true God, let us remember, – all flesh is grass, but the Word of our God will stand forever. This is most certainly true.

And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Amen.