

“How Comfort Arrives”
December 6, 2020

Isaiah 40:1-11
Mark 1:1-8

The prophet Isaiah speaks a word into the wilderness—into the wilderness of the world, in the wilderness of our lives. It is the living word of God: “Comfort, O comfort.”

In spite of all that is so wrong in our world these days, in faith we sense that there is something in the universe that does not want human suffering;

something that abhors the evil that we see and experience and do even more than we do;

something that will yet forgive the wrong we do and that still hopes for the repentance of all people.

I watched a TV news report showing a father hugging his daughter as she cried after a tragedy. Over and over he kept telling her: “It’s going to be all right. It’s all right now. It’s going to be all right.”

This is how we long to be embraced.

This is what we long to hear.

The voice speaks to us “Comfort, O comfort my people.”

In our sorrow and in our joy, “Comfort, O comfort.”

In our best actions and in our worst: “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.”

The words fall softly upon listening ears; they fall gently upon open hearts.

When the trees look dead,

when the grass has withered,

when the flower has faded,

we hear a word of flourishing and endurance.

When memories of past failures dare us to continue,

when present days are difficult to bear,

when there seems little hope for the future,

we hear a word that comes tenderly, reminding us that—even if nobody else does—God calls each of us forward into life.

In our affliction and in our affluence, we wait to hear that word.

Comfort, O Comfort.

Yes, there is another word that we also hear in the wilderness. “Repent.”

“Prepare the way of the Lord,” John says.

John can sound harsh and foreboding. His words often come to us more as affliction than comfort but they are filled with grace.

John’s call to repentance is the offer of God’s forgiveness.

Make the slow and ever-necessary turning around. Place your feet firmly on the path that leads toward the God who waits for you, the God who comes to all of us.

The call to repentance is a call to action. “In the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord.” We don’t just bide our time—we actively bring about the advent, the coming of God into the world.

This is the active waiting of Advent.

These days are a time for us to give special attention to the way of life we are to live all year long—bringing tidings of comfort to those who dwell in the shadow places of our city and our world.

Listen.

In a world of affliction, we will still hear God’s word of comfort. We hear it especially this morning in the music that announces the birth of new possibility.

Make this comfort and this possibility a reality in your life in that way, in this world of affliction, prepare a new road.