

2nd Sunday of Advent – Year B

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; 2 Peter 3:8-14; Mk 1:1-8

Aloha everyone.

"Comfort! Give comfort to my people, says your God."

What beautiful words we've heard today from the prophet Isaiah. How wonderful they sound to us, particularly in this time of the COVID pandemic when we are waiting for the vaccine.

Certainly, the vaccination will bring great relief, both physically and emotionally, to the world in waiting. Unfortunately, "a vaccine is unlikely to be ready for worldwide use by the beginning of the next year at the earliest," as reported.

"Comfort! Give comfort my people, says your God."

These words of Isaiah are comforting to us as they comforted the Jewish people when they were in captivity in Babylon for many years. They were written for the people for whom things had gone terribly wrong. A terrible calamity had taken place. The nation had been overrun by the Babylonian armies in 587-86 B.C.

Jerusalem was destroyed and laid waste and most of its prominent citizens, approximately 15,000 people were rounded up and led off into exile. There they were held against their will in servitude to their captors for nearly seventy years, separated from parents and children, husbands and wives, most never to see each other again.

It was a long captivity. Few of the original captives lived to return. Generations of children were born and grew up there having only heard stories of the land from which their parents or grandparents had come.

Through all those years, however, Jerusalem was still their "home" and remained an ardent and burning hope for many to return.

We're not much different, are we?

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In these months of the COVID pandemic, we find ourselves in captivity, don't we? And we yearn for the day when we can be free from its oppression and return to the normalcy of life.

Whether we like it or not, at the present time, we are being held captives by the coronavirus and in some cases by our own behavior and fear. We're not nearly as free as we think we are. Yes, we are a people being held in exile like those of old; we are those Babylonian captives.

During lock-downs, we were ordered to stay secluded in our homes and wrap our faces in cloth should we dare to go out for groceries or supplies. Even when we are in church, we see each other, or rather we can only look at each other but never get too close. Each of us are sadly in our own space, hiding from the virus and hoping to keep it away from ourselves and one another.

This deadly virus makes us feel that we are held captive as though in a foreign land. But we know the day will come, as Isaiah **prophesied** in the first reading,

**“the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and
all people shall see it together.”**

When life is restored all around us, we will see signs of living, signs of awakening, signs of returning and of joy. But for now, we wait. In many ways, many, if not all are still awaiting with an ardent hope.

Some of us are coping with the situation now, others of us are struggling, and perhaps hanging onto the end of the rope. Whether we have our material needs met and are downright comfortable or are worrying about tomorrow and what may happen, there's still that deep longing, that burning hope in all of us. There's that certain emptiness that we can't seem to fill. There is that deep desire to go home. And for us, home is life with God — plain and simple.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

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Today, we are beginning our second week of preparation for Christmas -- we are preparing for a renewed welcoming of Christ into our lives. It's important to remember Advent is a perfect opportunity to reflect on and truly prepare the way of the Lord in our lives. This implies some work on our part.

When we prepare for someone coming over to dinner we don't just wait until that person arrives and then start thinking about what we are going to serve them. Because we want to make **this time** as pleasant and happy as possible, we actively begin preparation for this event. We prepare.

Similarly, during this season of Advent let us all take time to allow the God of consolation to enter our lives more deeply. And how do we do that?

By praying as a family, by making sure that our home is a place of love and forgiveness, by teaching a child to know and love God, by sharing with others what God has given us. This is our Advent preparation.

So, at this time of waiting and longing, of expectation and hope, let's ask God "come quickly and not delay" and help us make the road straight in our lives, as John the Baptist calls us to do, trusting that God will give us the grace to open our hearts and homes in welcome and see the Lord in every person and every situation.

When we do this, when we make room for God in our lives, then we are no longer lost, stuck, or held captive but we are forever freed and filled with the inner strength so we may find true comfort in the midst of whatever distress or turmoil or sorrow we may find ourselves.

**"Comfort, give comfort to my people, says the Lord God ...
And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and we shall see it together."**