

St. Paul: On The Same page

for 12.07.14 Advent 2b

Day One: Isaiah 40:1-11

¹ *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.* ² *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.* ³ *A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God..."*
⁶ *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.* ⁷ *The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass.* ⁸ *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.*

The prophet begins with words of comfort. When we think of the end of the world and God's judgment, those are not the words we expect. A few years ago, when many took the ending of a Mayan calendar to mean that the world would end in 2012, a popular movie showed scenes of massive destruction. Huge

waves swept over cities, and even over mountains. Great segments of the earth were upturned and whole buildings swallowed.

But announcing his coming judgment, God tells Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly..."

What he says later, about all of us ("all flesh") being like grass, that sounds more like the unhappy prophecies we expect to hear. We all know that our lives are short.

But then he says that God's word stands forever. Here is our true comfort, the greatest comfort, that God's promises will never end – never fail – never fade.

John the Baptist came in fulfillment of these words, and he announced our Savior, the true Word of God who never fails. Truly, "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."

Prayer: *Father in heaven, our lives are so fleeting, but your promises endure forever. Let me live in your promises now, and for all time. Amen.*

Day Two: 2 Peter 3:8-14

⁸*But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* ⁹ *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance...* ¹¹*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God...*

That one sentence about one day being “as a thousand years” has been misused to justify all kinds of wrong teachings. Usually people pay attention to only the first part, that a day is a thousand years, and multiplying it to millions and billions of years they try to prove that the six days of creation could have been 6 billion years.

Unfortunately for that line of thinking, Peter also says that a thousand years is like a day. God is not affected by age and time. It doesn't matter to God how long or how slow things take. He keeps his promises no matter what.

The central meaning of these verses is simple and encouraging, *God is not slow in keeping his promises.*

It might seem like it. In fact, at times you might wonder if God will keep his promises at all. We see injustice all around us. Many things are wrong and we wonder when they will be made right. People suffer! But Peter assures us that in God's own time he will come with justice.

Instead of worrying about what God is doing and criticizing him, perhaps we should consider our own behavior. God always keeps his promises. He will bring justice in the end. But do we?

Knowing that the Lord is coming soon in righteousness, how should we live? Knowing that God will handle justice, should we take judging into our own hands, or should we be about the business of mercy, as he commanded?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, time drags on and the evil still seem to prosper. Sin and sickness and sorrow fill the world. When will it all be made right? Lord, help me to make a difference in my time, knowing you will come in your time. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 1:1-8

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

“John appeared...” It almost sounds like he just popped up suddenly in the wilderness, and in a way that’s true. Although God predicted John’s ministry centuries before, and although John’s work would be terribly important, his entire ministry would last only a few years at most.

Like a one-hit-wonder, a musician that bursts on the scene and then disappears – or like an Olympic athlete who takes all the gold but then retires after an injury - John was famous. Everyone was talking about him. All the important people came out to hear him preach. But in only a few years he fell afoul of the powers that be. He was arrested, and then beheaded, and then forgotten.

John came to announce Jesus’ coming and to call the nation to repentance, and

soon after that he was killed. He was never published. Only fragments of his sermons have been preserved. By our modern standards he might be considered a failure. But God used his work just as he planned. He changed lives. He proclaimed the word. He prepared the way.

Does your own work sometimes seem pointless and inconsequential? We put in our time; we achieve a few things; but soon we are gone and who remembers us? Thirty years, a gold watch, and then what?

Yet God uses us, just as he did John, to achieve an eternal purpose. We may never be published, but our words that share Jesus will never perish. Our physical works may not last, but our work in Jesus’ name lives on.

John had one task in life. What has God called you to do? Whose life has he called you to touch?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you have called me to my work. Some days it doesn’t seem like much, but I offer it to you and pray, use it to your glory. Amen.*

Day Four

Hymn: “Comfort, Comfort Ye My People” (LSB347)

*“Comfort, comfort ye My people,
Speak ye peace,” this saith our
God;*

*“Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning ‘neath their sorrows’
load.*

Speak ye to Jerusalem

Of the peace that waits for them;

Tell her that her sins I cover

And her warfare now is over.

In the short “career” of our lives, this is our message. Just like John the Baptist, we are called to share a message of comfort, that our Savior came – and will come – to bring relief from the sins that have burdened us. But what message of peace should you share?

We tend to comfort people with words that sound pleasant, but actually have little meaning. We say things like, “It’ll be OK.” Will it really? Cancer is not OK. Divorce is not OK. Death is not OK. God is opposed to all these things that bring sadness and misery.

We might tell people, “this too shall pass” or “it could be worse.” But it is no comfort to compare our troubles with

someone else’s, or to simply hang on until they fade.

God’s comfort is greater. His message that we are to carry is this: “God’s peace is waiting for you. God has covered your sins. Your battle is over.”

All our lives we fight against the effects of sin in ourselves and in others. And day after day it feels like we are losing the war. But God says that he has won a victory for us, and his peace is there for us.

Jesus has brought peace. As God’s Spirit brings struggling hearts to faith, the crooked road is made straight, the rough places are made plain, and we see the glory of the Lord in our own hearts as he fills us with his grace.

Comfort those who live in darkness. Your warfare now is over.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, let me comfort others with the comfort that you have given me. Amen.*