

# St. Paul: On The Same page

for 01.18.15 Life Sunday

## Day One: – Isaiah 40:1-2

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to (speak to the heart of) 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.*

The prophet Isaiah is writing words of comfort to the people of Israel, but he is writing these things at least 150 years before they would come true. In fact, he is offering them comfort even before they need it!

If you were a citizen of Israel in the 600 or 700 years before Jesus, you would be watching your nation grow more and more corrupt. You'd be shaking our head, worrying about what kind of world your children or grandchildren would live in. Marriage was taken lightly. Divorce was common. There was much injustice, but women and poor people were especially mistreated. Immorality was public, and false gods were worshiped even in Jerusalem!

The prophets all warned that God's punishment was coming, and you could see the slowly rising power of enemy nations around you. What would happen?

About 90 years after Isaiah's death the final blow would fall. God's temple would be destroyed and all the people dragged off into slavery. And yet, even after all his warnings, and even before the people have been punished or have repented, Isaiah tells them about the forgiveness that is coming.

God announces his mercy even before he has imposed his justice! "Comfort my people... speak to the heart of Jerusalem..."

Our nation, and all the nations of today, also deserve God's judgment. If we told them his punishment was coming, they would not change their evil ways. But he calls us, like Isaiah, to point out God's coming mercy. Evil days may come to us – but God's love will come even more surely.

**Prayer:** *Lord, let me be a prophet of your grace, a messenger of your peace. Help me to speak to the heart of your people today. Amen.*

## Day Two: Corinthians 4:1-18

*Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God...*

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

Abortion has been practiced in the United States since before we became a nation. It has only been legal since 1973. But even before that year our nation was not free from guilt.

We tolerated centuries of slavery, of torment and abuse and killing. We permitted abusive child labor. We

perpetrated injustice against the weak, violated treaties, and limited freedoms of many.

In short, we have been like every other nation in history. We have done terribly wrong things. And I believe that God has done very good things among us, and many have been blessed.

But since 1973 we have permitted the cruel deaths of over 50 million innocent children. Anyone who looks at this must surely despair. When will it ever change?

And yet, though we seem helpless to change either ourselves or our country, God is merciful. "We are afflicted... but not crushed."

"We do not lose heart." But instead we resolve to simply speak the truth. Not to win by deception or stratagem, but "by the open statement of the truth..."

It doesn't matter what your political party is, or what slogans you prefer. This much cannot be denied, these are God's children, and they need us.

**Prayer:** *Father, fill me with love, not anger. And move me to speak the truth to bring healing and comfort to a broken nation. Amen.*

### Day Three: John 14:1-7

*“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”*

In the first lesson, Isaiah was called to “speak to the heart of Jerusalem.” In the second lesson, Paul said that “we do not lose heart” because of God’s mercy. Now in the gospel lesson, Jesus tells his disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

Are you detecting a theme? In a very broken world, a world in which many are sick, many are suffering, and many are dying, Jesus offers us comfort for our wounded hearts.

There is a popular conservative talk radio personality who often quotes this Bible verse. “Let not your heart be troubled.” I suspect he does not realize how inappropriate this is. When he says, or when any of us say these words, it’s like telling people, “Don’t worry. Be happy!”

The radio host seems to suggest that we don’t need to be troubled because he is right there on duty, at his microphone, to defend the country from the bad guys. As well-meaning as that is, we all know it’s meaningless. Neither he nor anyone else can meet our challenges for us.

But when Jesus says, “don’t let your hearts be troubled,” it is *real* comfort because he is promising his followers that he is there. Even though he is about to suffer and die, he will be there. And even though he would soon ascend to heaven, he would still be there.

Jesus is with us, and he *can* do all that we need.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, like Isaiah you bring comfort to my heart. Let me share this comfort with all those who hurt. Amen.*

## Day Four: 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, <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. <sup>6</sup>If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. <sup>7</sup>Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.*

Paul doesn't talk about our hearts in this text, like in our other three lessons, but I chose these words for our fourth devotion because they are the next step – after we have received the comfort for our hearts that God gives.

You know someone who has had an abortion. You know someone who has lost a child because of illness, or who is grieving at the loss of someone else they love. You probably know several people who have lost a child by

miscarriage, and others who have been unable to conceive a child. You know someone who carries guilt because of their actions in the past, or who carries bitterness because of harm that others have inflicted on them.

You know hurting people. It's not apparent on the surface. We all look like the smiling pictures of people we see on television and in advertising. But it is true of even those people! They each have some grief or suffering.

Those of us who have been given God's comfort – those who know what it is to be soothed with the knowledge of resurrection and eternal life – those who know what it means to have all their sins washed away – we have comfort to share!

The comfort that we share is the very comfort that we ourselves have needed. And as God spoke to our hearts and proclaimed our release from slavery and death, so we have good news to speak to those who weep.

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, let me take one more moment to luxuriate in your comfort. And now, send me out to share it. Amen.*