

Advent 2 12/10/17
Isaiah 40:1-11 B

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.

It's jingle bells, "ho, ho, ho" Santa Claus is coming to town, deck the halls with balls of holly, pretty presents wrapped in pretty paper with ribbons and bows; and all that means it's supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year. But honestly, I think this time of year can be the most UNCOMFORTABLE time of the year.

The Weather, today it's not too bad. But this past week, we got – yet another – reminder of how frightful the weather can be. The weather this time of year can make us quite uncomfortable.

It's cold and flu season. That cough, that tickle in the throat, means that if you don't already have a cold, tomorrow you will be sick. Cold and flu season can make you uncomfortable this time of the year.

And then, there's family coming and, yea, family can make you uncomfortable, especially Aunt What's-her-name with the bright red lipstick that insists on kissing you and branding you with that lipstick. And after marking you with her lipstick, she quickly moves into making everybody's business her business, especially your business. She just can't leave anyone alone, including you, "You aren't married yet? When are you two going to have a baby?"

Then, of course, there is the workplace and the Christmas party. Oops, I mean the WINTER SOLSTICE gathering, where your co-workers show up in their holiday sweaters, drink way too much booze, every joke is a sexual innuendo, and you sit there ... uncomfortable.

But, you know what really makes you uncomfortable this time of the year? The Prophets. Here we are in the season of Advent, and shouldn't we be talking about decking the halls with ball of holly? Instead, there is Isaiah telling us, "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...We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away" (Is 40, 64:6).

And then, along comes this John the Baptizer guy, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance...Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:7-8,10,12).

Prophets like Isaiah and John, they make us uncomfortable and the reason why isn't heard to figure out – they show you your sins. They hold'em up before your very eyes to see. There is nothing that makes you more uncomfortable than your sins. You know what that's like. You hear the Prophet's word about sin and then it comes to mind – that one particular pet sin of yours. You know the one I'm talking about. It's the one you keep doing again and again and again. You know you shouldn't, but you keep doing it. It's ever present in your life. You've tried everything – you've prayed, you've vowed never to do it again, maybe you have even talked to someone, a brother or sister in Christ, about it. But, it's still there, haunting you.

And, you hear the prophets word and know that like the grass, your sins are going to cause you to wither. You're like the leaf that fades. Your iniquities are going to blow you away like the wind.

Here's the other thing about the Prophet's words: You are a Christian. You know right from wrong. You know what is God-pleasing and what is sin. So, when you sin, you can't say "Oops, I did it again. It was an accident." That temptation is ever before you, and it promises you pleasure and joy and meaning for your life. It's tempting you: say this, do this, think this, leave that undone. You know you shouldn't, but you do, and then the guilt and shame and remorse hit you. And, the Prophet's voice comes, "Surely the people are grass." That's you! And, you remember the words of the Lord your God, "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me (Ex 20:5). "The wages of sin is death," (Rom. 6:23). And it all comes crashing down upon you – and you are broken. You are frightened. The prophet did that to you, because that's what the Law does, it makes you uncomfortable.

So, God Himself speaks, "Comfort, comfort my people." The Lord your God brings you comfort. He calls you His people, even though you sin over and over and over again; even though you conform yourself to this present age over and over again. He calls you His people because He has acted to save you from yourself and your sin. He has acted to put an end to the warfare that goes on within yourself; when you find yourself doing the evil that you do not want to do. He has acted to pardon all your iniquities; to forgive you all your sins. He comforts you by giving you double for all your sins.

That comfort come to you in the Christ Child of Bethlehem. Isaiah tells us, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Is 9:6). That child, that Son, is the Lord Jesus Christ, born true God and yet true man. Born to be your substitute. Born just like you in every way, except for one thing – He has no sin of His own. So, He took all of your sin from you. What sins? All your sins. That pet sin you commit over and over and over again. The sins of your youth. The sins you did knowingly. The sins you are not ever aware of – He took all of those sins from you into His own body. Then as your substitute, He went to Calvary’s cross and there He suffered the punishment, the death, the wages of your sin. Isaiah says it this way, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His stripes we are healed” (Is 53:4-5).

Jesus died and rose again for you, and because He did, the warfare between you and the Lord your God is ended. Your iniquities are pardoned. Your sins are forgiven. God is not angry with you anymore. All of this is yours because of Jesus and what He did for you.

God gives you divine comfort in Jesus. And, that is Good News for us, because we live among so many things that make us uncomfortable. Every day that we live on this side of heaven, the devil, the world, and the weakness and doubt of our sinful flesh make us uncomfortable. God comes to us, as He came to give comfort to Camden this morning. In the new birth of Holy Baptism, God forgave all of his sin, delivered him from death and the devil, gave him eternal life. That is the comfort God gave you in your baptism. And true to His promise that He will never leave us

nor forsake us, God continues to comfort us through His Word and the life-giving Body and Blood of Jesus, in the midst of so many dangers.