

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, Faith Family**Title: Comfort ye, Comfort ye My People****Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11 (NRSV)**

- ¹ Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
- ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.
- ³ A voice cries out:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
- ⁵ Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."
- ⁶ A voice says, "Cry out!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
- ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.
- ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"
- ¹⁰ See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
- ¹¹ He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep.

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. I hope you will have time to encourage, comfort, and thank each other at the end of the year!

A lot has happened over the past week. First, I had an opportunity to help Clear Lake Food Pantry as a volunteer this past Tuesday morning. While there, I met many angels who gathered to help those in need. We put the prepared food in each box and carried it. The food included the comfort and love of the volunteers, and they made my heart warm and grateful. I hope we have time to convey God's comfort to our neighbors during this cold winter. And, this past Thursday, we had our Charge Conference of which we had prepared for a few months. We had time to check our budget for 2021 and ministry plans. DS Barb shared Hebrews 12:1-2 and we had time to share joys. It was my first conference, and I was nervous at the time. So, when I shared my joys, my mind went blank. After the conference, I recalled my joys I have. In this difficult time of Covid-19 all over the world, the Lord sent me to Wisconsin and gave me the opportunity to serve Willow River Parish. It is the Lord's blessing that I started a new beginning in the journey of my ministry with you. I am very grateful to the warm-hearted church members for welcoming my family and me warmly, always cheering, praying, and supporting me.

Advent is a time to wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Human beings already experienced the birth of Jesus when He came to us as a savior. What is the gospel? It is a fact that Jesus Christ came to us as a savior. So if we summarize the Bible in two sentences, they are 'the Lord who came,' and 'the Lord who will come.' The Bible bears witness to it.

Today's scripture reading is the words of prophet Isaiah. He proclaims the word of God: "Comfort...Comfort." God is with us and comforts us. The one of the origins of the word, the Holy Spirit is the comforter. He is a holy mentor who listens to me, sympathizes with my pain, and becomes a healer.

Verse 1 says, “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.” (1) It is God’s comfort and proclamation that the people who were taken to Babylon will be free from it and will return. It is concrete and it is not just words, it shows a concrete vision. Like this, God’s salvation comes with comfort.

Verse 2 says, “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her.” (2) God’s great comfort was proclaimed. A cry of comfort is not only heard in the ears, but must be testified directly to the heart. When I preached in California as an intern pastor for the first time, I included my knowledges about philosophy, religion, and theology in my sermon. It was not easy for the audience to understand, and after that my pastor advised me that “sermons are not a time to convey academic knowledge, but should come from your heart.” True comfort from the heart heals humans. God’s comfort restores us from sin. The key message of Isaiah is God’s forgiveness and comfort.

Prophet Isaiah says that “A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.’” In general, there is no way in the wilderness. No one wants to go there because the way is too dangerous. However, why does God come to the wilderness and desert? Why does God come to the wilderness, not to a well-graded road? Humans don’t use the way in the wilderness. Rather, they refuse it. But God uses the wilderness unlike humans. It is the way of God, not the artificial. God’s way is beyond our common sense. John the Baptist proclaimed the kingdom of God by quoting Isaiah’s words: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Mark 1:3, NRSV)

Advent is a season for preparing the way of the Lord. During this period, we must break the chain of sin and confess it to God, and sing a song of hope. Verse 11 describes God as a good shepherd. He protects his sheep and leaves to find the lost sheep. The message of Advent is Immanuel, which means God is with us. We are waiting for that God to come to

save us like the shepherd. The message of the Old Testament indicates the coming of Christ.

I recalled what happened to my family this past Wednesday morning, meditating on Immanuel God. That morning Evan fell from over three feet high. He fell headfirst onto the wooden floor, and I cried so much in surprise. Even after Esther hugged him and breastfed him, he did not stop crying. We called the hospital to make an appointment, but they were so busy so we couldn't get in, so we left a voice message and waited. While waiting, he calmed down, and as soon as I got a call from the hospital, my family and I went to Amery hospital to see a doctor. He checked Evan's body and head bones, his eyes and ears, and said that he would be okay. We believe that God is with Evan every moment and protects him. That evening we went to Deer Park Church and had a time to praise and pray. The comfort of God touched our hearts and minds and we appreciated that He protected Evan from serious injury.

Advent is the news of hope. "Comfort...comfort" is not just a statement for the Israelites, but also is a proclamation for my life. God comforts His people. He still remembers those in despair and comforts them. Therefore, we must remember the will of God during this season. He plans the event of salvation for us. May our God comfort us and restore our lives, and touch the hearts of each of us. Amen.