

Isaiah 40:1-11
2011
Mark 1:1-3
Advent)

Comfort! Comfort!

Dec. 4,

(2nd Sunday of

The Bible tells us that God is the God of healing. He heals not only physical wounds but also spiritual wounds: “I am the LORD who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). Whenever I visit those in the hospital, I always try to comfort them by reading Bible verses and praying with and for them. I also remind them that God not only cares for them but also can restore them with good health: “For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 30:17). When we are going through difficult times, we need comfort from others – family, friends, pastor or professional counselors. God also comforts us when we are faced with sickness, anxiety, fear, and even the loss of loved ones. I want to quote the following poem, which describes God as the comforter:

The Psalm Of Comfort

The Lord is my Counselor, I shall not feel insecure.
He leads me into quiet moments of meditation;
I hear Him bid me be still.
He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of service that I may glorify His name.
Even though the darkness of selfishness, greed and hate would destroy me, I am not afraid.
The promise of His word keeps me firm.
In the presence of my sin and failure He proves His love.
His forgiveness washes away all guilt, my joy knows no bounds.
Surely as I serve Him with love and humility
He shall abide with me and I shall know His peace -Margarette A. Wood -

In that poem, the following phrase applies to the Israelites who had been captives in Babylonia: “In the presence of my sin and failure He proves His love; His forgiveness washes away all guilt, my joy knows no bounds.” Because of their disobedience and sin against God, the Israelites were brought to this foreign country and had suffered for a long time; they were afflicted physically, emotionally, and spiritually; their lives were exploited in many ways as captives. In the midst of their distress, the steadfast love of God upon them was unchanged; God had been watching over them. In God’s time, He told Isaiah to give to His people these words, “Comfort, O comfort *my* people, says the Lord” (v.1). What a comfort that God calls you “my people” –chosen one and beloved children.

Throughout this past week, those words not only inspired me but also led me to consider through my daily ministry of visiting patients, calling those who need pastoral care over the phone, preparing sermon, and even having a conversation with others: “How can I reach out to people with compassion and comfort while we live our lives in the wilderness of this world?” What about you? – Do you hear God’s voice challenging you to comfort others around you who need your comforting or encouraging words?

A dictionary defines comfort as “To soothe in time of affliction or distress; To ease physically; relieve *n*. A condition or feeling of pleasurable ease, well-being, and contentment; Solace in time of grief or fear; help; assistance.” From where does comfort come? Or how can we practice God’s words of comfort?

First, God sometimes comforts us through our family and friends in times of our needs. Have you ever heard from your friends or family - you're my rock or you are my angel? A recent study indicates the importance of having good friends for your health and your happiness:

Research was done recently by Dr. Daniel Kahneman, psychologist and Nobel-winning economist, on why people don't make rational choices . A journalist asked him how his research changed the way he lives? He answered: "When you analyze happiness, it turns out that the way you spend your time is extremely important. *Decisions that affect how much time you spend with people you like are going to have a very large effect on how happy you are* – not necessarily satisfied with your life but happy. So yes, I've learned things (*TIME*, November 28, 2011).

"There was a 35 % decrease in risk of dying during a five-year study among people who reported being *happy, content or excited on a typical day*, as compared to those who were sadder or more anxious (*TIME*, Oct. 31, 2011). God doesn't want us to be sad or anxious. Rather, He wants us to restore the joy, peace, and love that the Christ Child brings during this Christmas season. We can be joyous not because our lives are going well, but because we focus on the Christ Child, the Savior of the world: "Joy to the World, the Lord has come."

Give God thanks for your loved ones, both family and friends, who comfort you as well as encourage you; God grants us good friends, loving families, and faith families as well.

Secondly, God oftentimes comforts us by His Word. Many a time has the despairing soul found peace and joy in the promises of the gospel. The Bible says, "You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" (v.9)

We Christians are Advent people who are looking forward to the return of Christ as we remember and celebrate the coming of God through the Babe Jesus Christ. God is with us through the body of Christ: "Here is your God!" You do not be afraid no matter what you are facing. God says, I am with you; "Here is your God!"

Third, God comforts us through our changed attitudes. "God often comforts us, not by changing the circumstances of our lives, but by changing our attitude towards them" –S.H.B. Masterman.

God's word and spirit continue to challenge our thoughts, lifestyle, and the purpose of our lives to fit with God. When we are challenged by God's words, our viewpoints can also be steadily changed.

God is our Counselor who is ready to help us through the power of the Holy Spirit: "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young" (v.11). God puts an end to the soul's trouble with his blessed presence; dispels the darkness, drives away despair and fear, infuses hope, breathes peace, and imparts comfort. God not only comforts us but also restores us to glorify Him through our services. God also tells us: "Prepare the way for the

LORD.” Comfort! Comfort your loved ones when they need you in God’s name and help them to prepare the way of the Lord. Amen.