

December 6, 2020
2nd Sunday of Advent

“Double Comfort?”

Grace mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Last week on the first Sunday of advent, we heard that advent is a time for us to slow down and at the same time we say, ‘hurry up Lord, come!’ But it's a time for us to slow down and prepare for the coming of Christmas; for the greatest message ever heard in the earth. It's time to prepare by going back to the Old Testament and looking at the prophecy. Prophecies made, prophecies fulfilled, prophecies that said, ‘Repent.’ Today we hear a very similar theme in our gospel; because Mark's gospel begins not with the birth of Jesus, but as Mark writes: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

What is the beginning? It's what immediately follows, a quote that we already heard in the Old Testament reading, and in our gospel reading from Isaiah, from prophecy. “Behold I send my messenger before Your face who will prepare Your way. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight.’” I think we probably all have heard that before several times. Have you ever really looked at it? Please again remember Isaiah was writing this over 600 years before Jesus was born. And we're looking here at a profound saying. Behold I send my messenger. Who was speaking? Who is the “My?” It is God. And so, God is saying, “I am sending My messenger before Your face.” And I think all too often we think of that as God is going to send John the Baptist before our face and we will see him. No, that is not correct. Listen again, “behold I send my Messenger before Your face; who will prepare Your way.” Who is “your?” It's Jesus. God is saying, “I'm going to send a messenger before you, Jesus; who will prepare the way for you, Jesus. Then we get, ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness.’ Now that's John the Baptist. But notice what he says here now. It is profound! “Prepare the way of the Lord.” When you look at that in Isaiah, it is LORD. It is all capital letters. That's YAHWAH. That is the personal name of God. And so, God is going to send His messenger; that's John the Baptist, to prepare the way for Jesus; who is then called LORD, YAHWAH, God. You see this is one of those reasons we believe in a triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit because here Jesus is referred to as YAHWAH. And what is John's job? To make His, that's Jesus' path straight. This takes us back to last week with Advent, the Coronation of the King and the King coming. They would make a highway for the King, nice and straight so that the King could come right into town. And that is exactly what John the Baptist's role was, to prepare the way for Jesus to begin His ministry. How do you straighten a crooked path, a crooked spiritual path? By baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of

repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Again, it starts with repentance; for us to acknowledge we are sinners, and we are in need of a Savior.

When we look at Isaiah's writing, like so often you have heard me say, 'context is everything.' Our Old Testament reading is from chapter 40 of Isaiah. Chapter 38 and 39 lay the groundwork. It's when Hezekiah was King. You can find the parallel story in 2nd Kings, chapter 20. Hezekiah was sick, Isaiah came to him, Isaiah the Prophet and he says to Hezekiah the King; "Thus says the LORD, Yahweh; "Set your house in order, for you shall die. You shall not recover." And Hezekiah's response to this unbelievably terrible news, is to turn his face to the wall and he prayed. Before Isaiah had left the middle court; so, you have the inner court area where the King was, the next section right outside of that is the middle court. So, basically Hezekiah turned to pray, Isaiah walked out the door and was going through the next room. Before he got out of the next room we read; 'God came to him and said, "Go back."' Why, because He had heard the prayer of Hezekiah. And so he told Isaiah, 'go back and say this to King Hezekiah. "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears, I will heal you."' By the way, this isn't going to be some long drawn out healing process. You know, something like COVID which sometimes takes months for people to get their strength back, their taste back, whatever. No, God goes on and He keeps adding to, it's not just I'll heal you, but on the third day from now you will go up to the temple worship me. You're going to be feeling that good. You're going to go up to the temple of worship; but wait there's more! I'm not just going to heal you; I'm going to add 15 years to your life. Oh, by the way, those Assyrians; don't worry about them. I will deliver you from Assyria. I myself, God, will defend Jerusalem, and He gives a reason. Why? For my own Namesake. So that the people of Judah, Jerusalem, and the Assyrians, and the Northern Tribes who had been taken away; would all know this is God who is doing this. But He also adds; and this is very important that we catch this because it's a dualistic promise. It's for His own namesake, but also for my servant David's sake. I want to get back to that just a minute.

But when Hezekiah heard these things, it was overwhelming to him. So much so that he asked for a sign. In fact, actually God told him ask for a sign because he was so overwhelmed. And God gave him the option of the sign. What would you like me to do? Would you like me to move the sun forward in the Sky or move it backwards? You're sick and in bed so you can only see the steps leading up to the building outside your window. The steps of Ahaz. Would you like Me to make the shadow move up or down? Hezekiah's response is, it will be easy to move the sun forward in the direction it's going make it go backwards Lord; and that's exactly what it did the sun moved back 10 steps.

So, at that time, that's what Isaiah writes: it's the time of the healing of Hezekiah. Emissaries from Babylon came. They brought gifts; why, well of course it was to celebrate Hezekiah's healing. Really? Is that really why? Well that's what they said. It tells us a little bit about politics back then even. They really wanted to get Hezekiah's response and they got exactly what they wanted. Hezekiah showed them all the wealth of Jerusalem, all his kingly wealth, all the wealth of the temple. When those emissaries left, Isaiah came into his Hezekiah and said, 'who are those guys?' Well emissaries from Babylon. Why did they come? Well they wanted to celebrate my getting better. And what did you do? I showed them all my wealth, you know in the palace, in the temple, and all the wealth of Jerusalem. I showed them how great the Lord has blessed us. To which Isaiah tells him, 'Hezekiah, everything you showed them they will come back and take. Not only will they take all the wealth of Jerusalem, all the wealth of the King, they're going to take all of Jerusalem and they're going to kill the people. And some of your sons, your very own sons born to you Hezekiah, will be taken and put in the kings' court of Babylon and they will serve as eunuchs. Hezekiah's response to that? Again, listen to it, "the word of the Lord that you have spoken to me is good." God's word is good even when it has judgment. Now of course those are those who will point out that it was good for Hezekiah, because it wasn't going to happen to him. It was going to happen to his son, Manasseh. And so, he was going to have peace for the first 15 years, but for the people it was very bad news. All their treasure gone, for many of them their life gone, the temple gone, conquest, death and for some of Hezekiah's own sons, eunuchs. They would to be castrated. This was not a good time that Isaiah spoke of.

But that's what leads to chapter 40. After hearing Jerusalem is going to fall; many are going to lose their lives, all the wealth will be gone, temple gone, some be eunuchs; God immediately comes back with: "Comfort, comfort." The double comfort. Why double? Well, in the Hebrew language they don't have punctuation like we do. They don't have an exclamation point and so repetition is a way of driving home the point. That's why we have holy, holy, holy is the Lord, God Almighty. But it also is literal. Martin Luther wrote; when it comes to this comfort, comfort; he says comfort means nothing unless there is malady or sickness. God had just spoken of the spiritual sickness there was and the result of it. And so, it is comfort, comfort, my people. Speak tenderly. Why? because they are wounded. They are going to be wounded. But the message is, your warfare has ended, your iniquity pardoned.

Which takes me back to comfort, comfort. Yes, it's a way of driving home the point but it's literal everything is being done in groupings of two, of pairs. So I said I'd get back to it; again, remember why is God going to be doing these things? For His own namesake and for the sake of David. Comfort, comfort, your warfare is ended. Your iniquity is part there is forgiveness. That concept of doubling continues;

“She, Jerusalem has received double from the Lord's hand. Double for all her sins,” is this punishment? No, it's post punishment God is going to bless in duplicate, in the wilderness. Why wilderness? That is where God purifies His people. They left Egypt to go into the wilderness, to prepare them for the Holy Land. They were going to be taken away to Babylon to prepare them for the next stage. The Messiah, Double, Wilderness. Make straight in the dessert a highway for our God. In the dessert there is nothing. So, from nothing, God is going to do something. A straight path of lineage. It's going to look like the lineage of David is gone because they are taken into captivity. The king is killed, his sons, his brothers are eunuchs. God is going to bring it up. And a straight path for forgiveness which comes through repentance. Again, double glory which comes from lineage and forgiveness.

The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it. Now, we are really getting into prophecy. ‘All flesh shall see it?’ We are talking judgment day. So, we are looking at physical deliverance, the glory of the LORD shall be revealed. They are going to come out of Babylon, their going to come back to Israel, the lineage is going to be preserved. The Messiah is going to be born. You are going to be delivered. There is spiritual and physical deliverance as well with judgment day. And why should we trust all of this? For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

This takes us back to last week, remember the sermon? I told you if you remember anything at all, remember this for Isaiah makes the point. What other God has done these things, for His people who wait? Only the God of the Bible. And so, when He tells us, the warfare is going to end, your iniquity is going to be pardoned. I'm going to preserve the lineage of David and I am going to do this for My namesake. Out of nothing because you guys are going into captivity, I'm going to raise you back up. The lineage will be restored, the Messiah will be born, and every eye is going to see when He returns. This is why prophecy; prophecies are so important. It prepares us for Christmas because we can start to rejoice now. We can look and see our God gives promises, prophecies and He always fulfills them. There is no one like Him. There is no other God who fulfills. We look at it and say, one more, one more prophecy and He is coming back!