

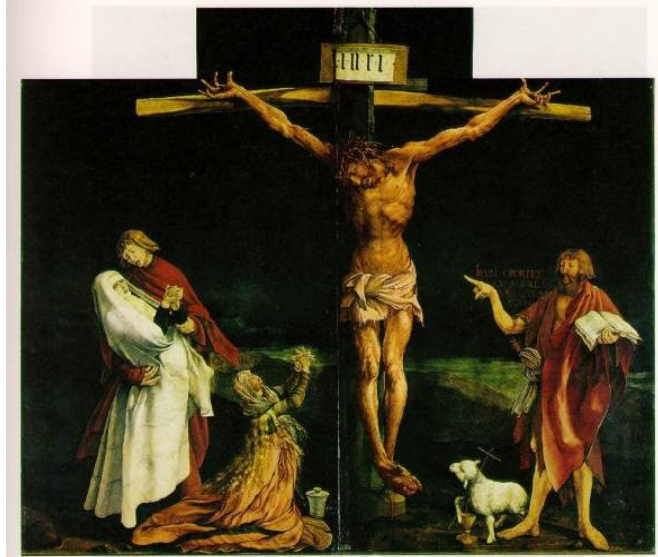
Second Sunday in Advent

Text: Isaiah 40:1-11

Theme: Comfort for Repentant Sinners

Have you ever looked back on your life in horror, wondering, “What have I done?” You look at some of the decisions that you made in your life, and they things that you are very ashamed of today. They have brought suffering and shame to you and trouble to other people. When you think of those things, you want to hide your face in shame.

If you have ever felt that way, you are in good company. On this Second Sunday in Advent, we remember the ministry of John the Baptist. He was the voice of one calling in the desert, “*Prepare the way of the Lord.*” He pointed people who were loaded with guilt to Christ as the Lamb of God who would take the sins of



the world away. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Thousands of people, who were loaded with guilt, came to John. They repented of their sins, which means that they turned from them, and they were baptized for the forgiveness of those sins. They came to John as sinners, burdened with guilt, and they returned home free of their guilt through faith in the coming Savior.

You are also a lot like Israel in the Old Testament. God had blessed them in so many ways. He chose them as His people through whom salvation would come into the world. It was a blessing, but it also came with great responsibility. The Lord said that they were to worship Him alone, and that they were to treat each other justly and compassionately. What did the people do? They began to follow the gods of the Canaanites. They became just as wicked and immoral as their neighbors. Because of those things, God would often have to chastise His people to get them to return to Him. He would send the neighbors around them such as the Philistines to cause trouble. Later on the Assyrians would destroy 10 of the tribes. One hundred fifty years later the Babylonians would destroy what was left. A small remnant of the people would be carried off into exile and return after 70 years. But God never gave up on His people. They would wander, and He would call them to repent and turn back to Him. In our text we see the comfort that God gives to repent sinners.

I. God speaks words of comfort to these people who wandered from Him.

Isaiah often uses a double imperative to get the attention of the people. A number of verses, including 51:9, 11, and 52:1 say, “*Wake up! Wake up!*” 52:11 says, “*Depart, depart, get out of there!*” 57:14 says, “*Build up, build up, prepare the way!*” Here there is a call for the prophet to comfort God’s people, these sinners who had wandered from God and His ways. Even though they had wandered, God still calls them His people. He still claims to be their God. Even though they had

been unfaithful to Him, He had remained faithful to them.

So the Lord calls on the prophet to speak tenderly to these stubborn people. When Isaiah was called in chapter 6, He was eager to go and proclaim the word of the Lord, but the Lord told him that no one would listen until all of their cities would lie in ruin. It was to these obstinate people, that the prophet was now to tenderly speak words of comfort. Listen to that first verse again, “*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.*” Those are the words that God also wants to speak to you when you have wandered from His ways. He doesn’t want to speak words of judgement and condemnation. He wants to speak words of comfort and peace. He is pleading that you turn from your sins to His grace and mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The next verse sets the stage for the rest of the book.

Isaiah begins by proclaiming that ***her warfare is ended***. Each of the next three sections of the book ends with the phrase, “*There is no peace for the wicked.*” (48:22, 57:21) In the first of these sections God would proclaim that He would be with them in all the trials that would soon come upon them. Isaiah was written before the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem and the people would be taken into captivity. Here Isaiah reminds those who have turned from their sins, that God was still with them. In 43:1 God says, “*Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.*” He even names Cyrus the Persian king, who would bring Israel out of their exile before the man was born. In this section Isaiah reminds those who repent and turn from their sins, that He is with them through any of the trials of this life.

That is a great comfort to us. Has the thought ever crossed your mind, “Why is God punishing me this way? What did I do to deserve this?” Those who live in their sins can’t find any peace when troubles surround them. As it says at the end of each one of these sections, “*There is no peace for the wicked.*” But those who repent of their sins and trust in God can find peace, even in the most devastating circumstances of life. The Lord reminds us that He is with us in those difficult days, even the ones that we brought upon ourselves. He will not leave us or forsake us. He called us to repent and turn back to Him. He will not turn His back on us now. This is the peace that passes all understanding. It is when Jesus says, “*My peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*”

Isaiah proclaims ***the forgiveness of sins***. Verse 2 goes on to say that Israel’s sin had been paid for. This goes right to the second section, which follows this, chapters 49-57. Again that section ends, “*There is no peace for the wicked.*” Those who reject God’s atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of their sins will never find peace. But this section of Isaiah’s book is filled with the prophecies about the atonement that the coming Savior would bring. It begins with a call by the Savior to follow Him. He is the One who was formed in the womb to bring Israel back to the Lord and to be a light to the nations. (49:5,6) Chapter 53 describes how this Servant would bear Israel’s sins and win the forgiveness of sins for them. It says, “*The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.*” (53:5)

That is the heart of our Christian faith. Christ bore our sins in our place. John the Baptist proclaimed that He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We confess our sins, and we trust that we have the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. He has taken them all away. We find peace in

knowing that every one of our sins is forgiven in His name. We have been baptized in His name for the forgiveness of all of our sins. Because Jesus paid for them, through faith in His name we are covered with His perfect righteousness, and God does not see a single one of our sins. They are all forgiven.

Finally, ***God promises His blessings*** to all who repent of their sins. The end of verse 2 says, “*She has received from the Lord’s hand double for all of her sins.*” That verse needs some explanation. Most people misunderstand it. It is not say that God has made Israel suffer doubly for all of their sins. That would contradict everything else that we have in the Bible. A good way to translate this verse is, “**She has received a double inheritance from the Lord’s hand in place of all of her sins.**” This is explained in the final portion of Isaiah’s book especially where he writes in 61:7, “*Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.*” When the Old Testament refers to the “double portion,” it is referring to the inheritance of the firstborn. The firstborn would receive twice as much as his brothers and sisters.(Gen 25:31, Dt 21:17) God promises repentant sinners abundant blessings.

This is exactly what St. Paul meant when he wrote, “*Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.*” This year I did my newsletter articles on CFW Walther, the first president of our synod. One of the things that he learned after the people confessed that they sinned in many ways when they first came to this country was that God can bless repentant sinners more than they could ever imagine. The point is that we should never think that our lives are destroyed because of our sins. God forgives them, and He blesses the life of each person who turns from their sin to His grace and mercy. Paul Gerhardt expresses this well in the 4th verse of his hymn, “All Ye who on this Earth Do Dwell,

**Though often we His patience try
And well deserve His frown,
In grace He lays His anger by
And pours new blessings down.**

God really does bless the lives of those who repent of their sins and trust in His grace, both on this earth, and especially in the eternal joys of heaven.

These words of Isaiah are words of comfort for all who mourn their sins. They remind us that God will be with us through every trouble, that He will forgive our sins, and that He will bless the lives of all who turn from their sins to His forgiveness in Christ. May God fill each of our hearts with that comfort and peace.

Amen.

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