

Life Sunday Sermon 2015

Isaiah 40:1-2 “Comforting Voices”

Rev. David B. Pappé, pastor at Saint Paul Lutheran Church, Brown Deer, Wisconsin

www.lutheransforlife.org

“Baby bye, here’s a fly, we will watch him, you and I ... There he goes, on his toes tickling baby’s nose.” Heartwarming lullabies like this are often sung to their little ones by the comforting voices of loving mothers and fathers. We are celebrating Sanctity of Human Life Sunday today. A day when we get to focus on several voices: God’s voice, our voices, and the voices of life. Voices that speak to the heart of life issues.

In our text for this special day, we obviously are hearing the comforting voice of God the Father. “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” (Isaiah 40:1-2).

A comforting voice is precisely what God’s people need to hear. We live in a world filled with many other voices—voices that call us to look elsewhere for comfort. There are loud voices telling that there is comfort in a woman’s right to choose to terminate her pregnancy. Last year a lawmaker even suggested that this “right” needs to be available in order to protect children from suffering! And then there are the voices urging euthanasia for the elderly and those with incurable maladies, claiming to be humane and comforting. Still others speak of comfort afforded the parents of “less than perfect” little ones by advising them it would be better if their imperfect offspring were never born.

What does God say to the woman with an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy? What does God say to those suffering with incurable pain and a sense of hopelessness? What does God say to the parents who are told their child will be born with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, or some other “less than perfect” condition? He says words of tender comfort, forgiveness, and blessing.

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If anyone needed a word of comfort, it was those who first heard these words penned by the prophet Isaiah. Most of Judah had been destroyed or taken captive by the Assyrian king Sennacherib. These were life-giving words for those experiencing the Babylonian exile and for those in Jerusalem waiting for their end to come. “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1).

These were truly life-giving words to those held captive. In the next verses we find an even more life-giving word of comfort. “A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 40:3-5).

Isaiah, inspired by God the Holy Spirit, was referring to the words God’s people would hear from the mouth of John the Baptist some 700 years in the future. Real words of comfort. Everlasting comfort would come in the call to repentance and faith in the One to whom John would later point out with these words: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) All who behold, those who look to and listen to Jesus, are enveloped in His comforting words of forgiveness, reconciliation, and hope. This is the tender message Isaiah was sent to proclaim in his day, and we are sent to proclaim in our day.

In Christ, our warfare is over. Our struggle with the imperfections of our sinful nature and the eternal fallout from our sins is over. On Calvary’s cross, when Jesus said: “It is finished,” (John 19:30) sin, death, and the devil were defeated. Our text puts it this way, “Iniquity is pardoned.” This means there is real hope for those caught in life-challenging situations.

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You see, there are other voices all around us. Voices calling out in fear and uncertainty. Voices seeking words of hope and comfort. The woman carrying the guilt of a previous abortion needs to hear that her iniquity (sin) is pardoned. In fact, all sinners need to hear the comforting invitation to repent and believe, including you and me. This was the comforting goal of the Baptist’s words: “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4)

“Your sins are forgiven.” What comforting words these are. Words that you need to hear. Words that I need to hear. Words that our sin-sick world needs to hear from us. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that her warfare is ended.” Our warfare, our struggle, is over. Our sins have been removed by Jesus’ holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. We are declared heirs of eternal life with Jesus. Yes, what comforting words these are! But there is still more.

“She has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:2b). *The Lutheran Study Bible* explains: “Penalty for her iniquity was paid, even though she could do nothing to make amends for the debt she incurred. She received from the Lord’s hand good things in double proportion to the punishment she received for her sins.” (Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, 2009, page 1151)

What blessings come from Jesus’ comforting and life-affirming words! Babies are born, cared for, and nurtured. Above all, they are baptized for the remission of their sins. Those living with what some call “disabilities” are given a chance at life. The elderly and those living in chronic pain are comforted and assured of their value and importance to God and His people.

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The rest of us are afforded the opportunity to proclaim in word and deed God’s comforting and life-affirming words!

What a privilege it is to echo Isaiah’s words in our daily lives, even as we sing:

“Comfort, comfort ye My people,
Speak ye peace,” thus saith our God;
“Comfort those who sit in darkness,
Mourning ‘neath their sorrows’ load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
Of the peace that waits for them;
Tell her that her sins I cover
And her warfare now is over.” (LSB 347 v. 1)

Do you know of anyone who is hurting, confused, or living in fear because of challenges in their lives? Do you know of anyone who needs to hear of the comfort that you have in Jesus?

This past Christmas season, you, no doubt, heard another reminder of how we get to respond to God’s life-affirming and comforting voice:

God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray,
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,
O tidings of comfort and joy.

Tidings of comfort and joy in Christ Jesus who came to save us from Satan’s power. This is what our fearful and hopeless world needs to hear. Tidings of comfort and joy are exactly what

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Jesus came to speak to the confused, the guilty, the vulnerable, all of us. Tidings of comfort and joy is what you hear every Sunday as you sit in God's house where your pastor proclaims: "Your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Having heard the good news of the Gospel, and having received the body and blood of the Lord in the Sacrament, you are filled with tidings of comfort and joy.

May the Lord now bless your voice as you leave this place to be His voice of comfort and joy to those whose ears and hearts are waiting desperately for His comfort. In Jesus' saving and comforting name. Amen.