



Daniel Waldschmidt – St. John's Burlington – 12/4/2016

Are you SAD? I don't just mean are you feeling glum. SAD, S-A-D, stands for Seasonal Affective Disorder. The change in season can actually make us depressed. It has to do with increased darkness in winter time, so one thing that can help with Seasonal Affective Disorder is to have lots of light in your house. One reason we have Christmas lights is to cheer us up and turn the darkness into something beautiful.

What you need most when you are feeling sad is a word from your God. And today in his word, God gives to his ancient people and to us a word of comfort. **"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."**

One group of people that really appreciated these words from God were the Israelites after they had been captured by the Babylonians. The Babylonians completely destroyed Jerusalem. They captured all the upper class and the middle class people and dragged them off to the foreign land of Babylon. The very poorest people were left behind sitting in the rubble. Both the people who were dragged away from their homeland and the people left sitting in the rubble needed to hear a word from their God.

Do you feel like you are in a place in your life where you desperately need to hear a word from your God? Do you feel like you are sitting among the rubble of your life? God has a word for you: **"Comfort, comfort, my people says your God."** Notice that he says it twice: "Comfort, comfort." That shows that he really cares about us and really cares about our woe. Notice also the pronouns. "My people...*your* God." God is not just God, he's *your* God. When you were baptized, God wrote his name on you and said, you are my child. Learn to say to yourself, "My Jesus says, 'Don't worry. I'm going to take care of you.'"

God had a word of comfort for those Israelites sitting in exile. **"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed,"** (40:2). "Hard service" refers to all of what the Israelites went through when they were carried off to Babylon. God says here, "That time is up and you get to come back home now." **"Her sin has been paid for."** This pictures sin like a debt that we owe to God. And Jesus paid that debt on the cross. **"She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."** What this means is that the Israelites had gone through some tough times. And they had brought it on themselves. It was because of their sins that they were led off to Babylon. But God says, "I'm going to give you more joy than you've had woe because of your sins." Sometimes God lets us suffer the consequences of our sins and that is necessary because those consequences teach us us not to do it again. But when those consequences for sins do their work and when we repent of our sins God says, "I'm going to give you more joy than you've had woe because of your sins." **"She has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."**

"A voice of one calling, 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.'" (40:3-4) What is God saying here to his Old Testament people? Well they had been captured and taken to Babylon. Now imagine a map. Jerusalem is here and Babylon is here. In between Jerusalem and Babylon there is a huge desert. It's called the Arabian desert. Normally to get from the Jerusalem to Babylon you would have to travel around the desert. Now God says, "I'm coming from Jerusalem to Babylon to rescue you. And I want to get there quick. So I'm not going to go around the desert, I'm going to go straight through the desert. I'm going to come straight to you."

God says, "I'm coming straight through the desert to rescue you and I want all obstacles cleared out of the way." **"The rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain."** It's kind of like when there is an emergency and the ambulance is called. The ambulance puts on the sirens and all the cars get out of the way.

God is coming to rescue us. What obstacle could be in his path? The obstacle in the Lord's path is impenitence. Impenitence is when we say that we are not sorry for our sins or if we think that our sins are not that bad in comparison to someone else. That's why John the Baptist proclaimed, "Repent!" Look into your own heart. What sin is there that you are not sorry about? What sin is there that you have no intention of changing? What sin is there that you think isn't all that bad? The sins that we think aren't all that bad are the sins we most need to be rescued from.

But the good news is that Jesus came to rescue us from those sins. **"And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together."** The glory of the LORD is the visible presence of God. The glory of the LORD is when God appears to intervene and rescue his people. Most of all the glory of the LORD was revealed on Calvary. When Jesus hung on the cross, that was God intervening to save us from our sins. When Jesus was hanging on the cross that was the Son of God hanging there revealing the glory of the LORD. **"And all people will see it together."** There were people there on Calvary that day who saw Jesus hanging on the cross with their physical eyes. And then that message was preached in all the world. The message is that Jesus has died on the cross and "your sins have been paid for." Every time this gospel is preached the glory of the LORD is being revealed. Every time a sermon is preached the glory of the LORD is being revealed.

"A voice says, 'Cry out' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'" These words could also be translated: "A voice says, 'Preach' and I said, 'What shall I preach?'" Every preacher asks "What shall I preach?" "What shall I preach on Sunday morning?" And the LORD's answer is, this is what you should preach: **"All people are grass."** That's what the LORD wants us to preach: "All people are grass." In our arrogance, we might feel very powerful at times, but we are all as weak as grass. **"The grass withers and the**

flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them." I've never been to Palestine but I'm told that the fields have very beautiful flowers. And at one moment the fields will be full of these beautiful flowers, but then there is a scorching east wind that blows in and withers and destroys them all in a single day. We who are young. We think we'll be young and strong forever. But of course that's not true. Some people say "father time is undefeated." But it's not father time. It's something else. It's the breath of the LORD. **"The breath of the LORD blows on them."** God said to Adam "For dust you are to dust you will return." We are all in Adam. We are descendants of Adam. So we all lose our strength and fall just like flowers.

And we might think, "Well we are the people of God. Surely the children of God should be exempt from life threatening diseases." But no. God says, **"Surely the people are grass."** Now we might at first think that "the people" refers to all people but it doesn't. Sometimes in the Bible "the people" refers not to people in general but to the people of God. This verse is saying that believers are not exempt from getting sick and dying because believers too are in Adam.

"All people are grass." This knocks down our arrogance. If you think you're invincible, you're not. If you're young, you won't be young for long. "All people are grass." So far not a very happy message. But look what it says next: **"But the word of our God endures forever."** The Apostle Peter picked up on this. He quoted this passage and he said, **"For you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For 'all people are grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever, and this is the word that was preached to you."** Within a week we have had two funerals at St. John's. So we've recently had a painful reminder of the truth of these words. But God also has a word of comfort for us: both Larry Rouce and Joyce Vohs, had been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable. They had inside of them a life that was imperishable born of the living and enduring word of God. They had inside of them a life that even death could not touch because they had been born again of imperishable seed. That means that they are alive, enjoying their inheritance right now in heaven. It also means that God will raise their bodies, not after the pattern of Adam but after the pattern of Christ. That's the word of comfort that God has for you today.

In these next verses, the city of Jerusalem is personified and God says to Jerusalem, **"Say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God! See, the sovereign LORD comes with power!'"** Remember at the beginning of the lesson God went from Jerusalem to Babylon to rescue the captives. Well now at the end of the lesson Jerusalem sees God coming back with all the liberated captives! And Jerusalem says to the other towns of Judah, "Look, God is coming back! And he has all the liberated people with him! God has rescued his people and brought them back!"

He says, **“Go up on a high mountain ... lift up your voice with a shout!”** God has given us Christians good news to proclaim and he wants to proclaim it from a high mountain. If you proclaim something from a high mountain your voice carries so that the most people can hear it. The mission of every Christian is to proclaim the good news. God doesn't want us to be timid, he says **“Don't be afraid.”** He wants us to proclaim the gospel loud and strong: **lift up your voice with a shout!”** Right now is the time to start inviting your unbelieving friends and family members to come to church with you on Christmas Eve. We want a packed church on Christmas Eve so that we can proclaim this message to as wide an audience as possible.

The lesson ends with one last word of comfort: **“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers his lambs in his arms, and carries them close to his heart.”** The picture again is the LORD returning to Jerusalem with all the rescued captives. And most of the rescued captives are walking alongside of the LORD but there are a few that are so weak that they can't walk, and so the LORD himself carries them close to his heart. If you feel like your life is rubble, you need to see this picture of the LORD returning with his liberated people and the ones who are weakest are the ones he carries close to his heart. So if you're feeling SAD this winter season, hear these words of comfort from your God: He carries you close to his heart. Amen.