

6 December 2020



Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40 vv1-11

A REFLECTION FROM JOHN BOURNE

Today, the second Sunday in Advent, is a time to remember the prophets and to light a candle in their memory.

Prophets were God inspired teachers and leaders of the Israelite and Jewish people. For three hundred years, they witnessed the good, the not-so good, and the bad times of their people's history.

They advised kings and rulers.

Shared the hopes and fears of ordinary people.

And walked faithfully with their God.

Biblical prophets did not predict the future.

They helped shape the present and expressed urgency and concern about times to come.

They exposed the major problems pervading their society, they saw corruption and brutality everywhere.

They challenged religious practice.

The prophets were unsatisfied with meagre hopes and dreams.

They had visions of a Messiah who would bring peace and hope to all nations.

It is to one such prophet that we turn today, the most famous of them all – Isaiah.

The Book of Isaiah covers 150 years of Old Testament history, implying it is a collection of writings.

Chapter 39 warns the people of Judah that they were facing defeat.

Exile to Babylon was imminent.

Chapter 40 was written some 80 years later to a people returning home after years of slavery and hardship.

They had suffered much.

In exile, they had sat beside the waters of Babylon and wept.

Chapter 40 is our reading for today.

Isaiah is speaking to a people preparing for a long walk home.

A trek on a hot, dusty, desert road, back to Jerusalem and the land they called their own.

The passage begins: -

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term,

A journey home is about to begin.

So, how does Isaiah begin his message of hope?

Well, it is with a word much associated with him, 'Comfort'.

Through these words of Isaiah, God promises to lessen His people's grief and distress.

To give them strength and hope for their journey.

Even before a step was taken or any preparation made, the people knew that God would comfort them on their way.

The Bible tells of others who went in the desert or on long journeys.

In such a place, Moses finds a burning bush and meets with God.

There God says, 'I am who I am.'

In the desert, Elijah found God's 'still small voice of calm'.

Jesus was tempted in the desert before his ministry began.

There he found the strength to overcome every difficulty that was placed before him.

In this season of Advent, we are looking towards Christmas.

Today, we turn to the prophets to lead us there.

And what better place is there to start our Christmas journey than with the word 'comfort'?

This year has not been easy, we all understand that.

Christmas 2020 will be unlike any we have known before.

It is hard to imagine Christmas with empty churches and an absence of carol singing.

Family gatherings restricted in number.

The lonely even more lonely.

World and national leaders under such demanding pressure.

May I suggest we make Isaiah's words, 'Comfort, O Comfort my people', a starting point for our Christmas journey.

That we also turn to the last verse of today's reading.

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.

The prophets of old understood the present and expressed urgency and concern about things to come. Let us follow their guidance towards the child of Bethlehem, the Messiah and hope for the world.

