

Advent 2

Sunday, December 6, 2020

Isaiah 40:1-11 Bethlehem

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Jesus.

Rev. George Ferch

Dear friends in Christ,

The signs are all around us. The five and tens are glistening once again. I doubt if anyone under about 40 even knows what a five and ten is. Think dollar store.

There are more toys in the stores than at other times. Holly decorates front doors. Decorated trees stand tall in hotels, tops of buildings and in parks. Bells are ringing, carolers are singing. "Its Beginning to Look a Lot like Christmas." The signs are all around us.

Signs point ahead so we can't miss what is coming. How about these signs? A virgin will conceive. A little town called Bethlehem will be great among the towns of Judah. People living in darkness have seen a great light. To us a child is born, a son is given. A heavenly host fills the night sky. Shepherds get directions. In a piece of artistic license, and the compression of time and events, a star appears in the east to lead Gentiles on a long journey to the manger.

What do these signs tell us so we can't miss him? **It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Jesus.** The prophet Isaiah writes how Jesus will bring God's mercy and comfort to his people. He writes about the only proper response to that mercy and comfort.

"Its beginning to look a lot like Christmas" is one of many Christmas carols we enjoy as all the signs point to our December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> celebrations of our Savior's birth. One of my favorites, and perhaps yours, is Handel's Messiah.

The Messiah first was presented in Dublin, Ireland on April 13, 1742. You noted that is not Christmas. We have come to associate this great musical work with Christmas. One reason is that tenor and chorus open the work with God's Word Isaiah spoke here to open chapter 40. Isaiah 40 is the turning point of the prophecy.

The first 30 chapters are a call to repentance. God prophecies the coming destruction of Jerusalem and captivity of his people in Babylon. Isaiah would not live to see these events take place a century in the future. The second part begins with the pure sweet gospel of God's forgiveness that is God's mercy. His mercy would bring comfort to his people as the Old Testament evangelist, Isaiah, faithfully proclaimed it.

In the midst of Israel's darkest most difficult days "Comfort, comfort, my people says your God. Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her, Her warfare really is over. Her guilt is fully paid for. Yes, she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Isaiah was assuring the people that it was beginning to look a lot like Jesus. Those who recognized their sins and trusted in God's Word found mercy and comfort in that Promise even though they never would see him with their fleshly eyes. All the sign were there. And closer to his coming, one would come to call the people to "prepare the way for the LORD." We heard about John the Baptist in our gospel lesson. Another merciful call to see my sin and trust my Savior. Repent and believe.

The sign that it is beginning to look a lot like Jesus is the pure sweet good news that my warfare with God over. My guilt is paid for. I have received from the Lord double for my sins. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, laid aside the full use of his glory and power to humble himself. Jesus came to be our Servant Savior. It is trite but true. Jesus is the Reason for the Season.

Isaiah also writes about the proper response that mercy and comfort.

"A voice is calling out: in the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD. In the wasteland make a level highway for our God." In ancient time, when a king came to visit, the people would prepare his way. They would raise up valleys and level mountains. They would smooth rough roads and straighten winding ones.

The road John the Baptist is describing is the road of our hearts. We do not build roads so that Christ will come into our hearts. Christ is coming into our hearts through the gospel and our response is getting obstacles and obstructions of sin out of the way. Jesus doesn't say, "If you get the concerns of this world out of the way, I will come to you." He says, "I am coming to you." We respond by turning away from the concerns of the world.

True repentance takes place in the heart. The EHV well reflects the Hebrew when it translates, "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem." It is to our broken and contrite hearts that the Holy Spirit works the comfort and peace we have in Christ. Comfort and peace are experiences that fill our hearts with joy.

"Comfort" is a word that conveys a certain feeling, in the sense of experience. Think of "comfort food," "sleep comfort bed," "a comforter." Why do they call the hotel chain, "Comfort Inn?" Isaiah closes our words with such a picture. "The shepherd will care for his flock. With his arm he will gather his lambs. He will lift them up on his lap. He will gently lead the nursing mothers."

Isaiah's words are so practical and real for us. In our darkest days of sin and distress, God says, "Comfort, comfort my people." Our comforter is the Good Shepherd who cares for his flock.

Its beginning to look a lot like Jesus. It would be wonderful to welcome him as He and countless angels fill the sky and gather us with our fellow saints into the New Jerusalem. Peter reminded us in our lesson that God is not slow in keeping that promise.

Now, that would be a Christmas to remember. If not, we look forward to celebrating his birth in Bethlehem. We spend our days reflecting on the mercy and comfort God gives to us in Jesus. We respond to his assurance of our pardon by building good roads for his coming, roads that show our hearts' delight that he is on the way. Amen. <SDG>