

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: Isaiah 40:1-5

Sermon Title: "Prepare the Way of the Lord, Who Is Sure to Arrive!" (First Sunday of Advent)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

November 27, 2016

**{SLIDE 1}** What are we waiting for? What do we wait for? Sometimes life is about waiting. We wait for somebody to come by and pick us up. We wait for the plane to arrive and fly us to our destination. We wait for the nurse to call us back to the room, and then we wait for the doctor to finally show up. Sometimes life is about waiting, and maybe much of that time we don't want to wait. We don't want to waste time sitting around, hoping for things to happen. We wish it could just happen, and then we don't have to do all this waiting.

**{SLIDE 2}** "Comfort, O comfort, my people," say your God." This is how Isaiah 40 begins. Words of encouragement. Words of joy. "Comfort, O comfort, my people." And these words are coming from God. "Comfort." Yes, maybe that is something we are waiting for: comfort. Maybe that is something we long to have. God tells us comfort is coming, and if God is saying it it is going to be great.

But when does this comfort come? God is saying,

Comfort, my people,” but when do we get it? As God says these words through the prophet Isaiah, the people who read these words are in a lot of trouble. They do not have any comfort. They have invasion. They have destruction. They have their lives turned upside-down and shaking to pieces. There is not much comfort for them to see or feel. God says, “Comfort,” but when? “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins.”<sup>1</sup> Okay, the people of Judah have been uncomfortable because they have royally messed up. Okay, they have destruction and chaos and panic because they did not listen to God, and they certainly did not follow God’s ways. They chose to live a certain way and it did not go well for them.

But now, in Isaiah 40, God is saying “Comfort.” The Hebrew word means to console and even to take revenge. God is taking care of the problems. God is consoling those who have suffered, and God will avenge those who have endured much pain. God is in charge, and God will take care of it. But when? When does the comfort arrive? Why would God speak of it, if

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 40:2.

it is going to be delayed? Why all this waiting?

{SLIDE 3} You know what we are waiting for? For Christmas to arrive. At least our children and youth cannot wait for Christmas to arrive. They want to know what they got under the trees. They want to see if everything on their wish lists were purchased. Some children are hoping that they get something for Christmas, anything. They are waiting for something to unwrap, God willing. Many of us, if not all of us, are waiting for Christmas to arrive. And yet, Christmas is not here yet. We have to wait. We have to go from one Sunday of Advent to another; we have to endure each and every day, going to work or going to school, before Christmas arrives. Sometimes the time seems very slow.

{SLIDE 4} Do you know what the word Advent means? It is a Latin word that means *coming* or *arrival*. Advent is one of the season we celebrate during the church calendar year. Lent is another major season we observe, and that doesn't come under next March. But right now we begin the first Sunday of Advent, and in fact the first day of Advent, which means *coming* or *arrival*.

What is coming? Christmas. But what is actually

arriving on Christmas? Presents? A Christmas tree? Santa Claus? Those things might be fun, but are they what we really wait for? Or, do we wait for Somebody much better?

Before we had all the presents and trees and decorations, we had a Savior. We had Jesus Christ, born to us as a King. God in the flesh, living among us. This is who people were waiting for. They were waiting for God to bring complete and total comfort to God's people. It wasn't just the people during Isaiah's time, but people of every time, who were waiting for comfort to come, and all of their sins being forgiven, and all of their focus placed on God alone. It wasn't a *what* that they were waiting for, like Christmas presents and Christmas trees. It was a *Who* they were hoping to arrive, and arrive soon. They waited a long time for God to come to them as Savior.

**{SLIDE 5}** "A voice of one calling in the desert..." How many times did God's people hear those words? How many times did they read them and wait? In Isaiah 40:1, it is God calling out to his people, "Comfort, O comfort." Now in verse 3 it is a voice calling out in the wilderness. We talked about the wilderness several weeks ago. The wilderness

represents struggle. It represents misfortunate and pain and anguish. People who find themselves in the wilderness find themselves in a terrible situation that not might end soon. God's people have been sitting in a wilderness, waiting for comfort to arrive.

And then the voice cries out, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."<sup>2</sup> Notice where the way is to be prepared for God: in the wilderness. Not in the green, fertile pastures. The highway is made straight in the desert, where there is misfortunate and pain and anguish. But not anymore, because one has arrived. One is coming to save us. One is coming to change the wilderness into a place where people may live and have comfort.

And it is a highway that is prepared, not a dinky little road. Not even a two-way street. A highway, eight lane, ten lane, a hundred lanes wide. It is a wide and flat road. All valleys are filled to accommodate the road. Tunnels are not blasted through mountains to allow the road to pass through; mountains are blasted and obliterated for the road of God to pass through. Uneven ground is flattered and the rough patches are made smooth.

This is the straight and noble path that is prepared

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 40:3.

for our God. He arrives and he gives comfort. He consoles us with his love and removes all the mountains and all the low gullies, all the rough and rugged areas of our lives. Nothing gets in God's way to give us comfort. Nothing obstructs God to bring his Son to earth, wrapped in human flesh, lying in a manger as a Babe but the Ruler of all nations and the Salvation of all creation.

**{SLIDE 6}** Now, a question needs to be asked at this point. Who prepares the way of the Lord in the wilderness, as the voice cries out in Isaiah 40? We could spend a lot of time trying to figure out who is crying out, but what is more important is who should respond? To whom is the voice crying out?

Usually the job is given to John the Baptist. In Mark 1 we encounter John the baptizer, and we discover that he is the one who responds to the call, "Prepare the way of the Lord." He is so moved by the words that he actually goes to the desert and preaches about Jesus' coming. He baptizes people in the Jordan and tells them to repent of their sin.

Yet, John the baptizer or Baptist is not the only one who should answer the call. The cry goes out to all of God's people. The cry goes out to those who have

been waiting for a Savior to arrive. Aren't we the ones doing the waiting? Then let us prepare the way for when Christ arrives.

**{SLIDE 7}** During the Advent season, do not be idle in your waiting. Do not be slowed down or even frustrated with the sights and sounds of the season. Be jubilant. Be hopeful. Be excited and ready for Christ to arrive. When we sing the Christmas song, sing them as hymns to the God who sends his Son to save the world. Sing them as people who know that Hope comes to those who seek it, and Hope moves us through our difficulties into God's peace. When you see all the light placed on trees and roofs and lampposts, think of the Light of the world. Eagerly await the Light to come and shine in all the dark places of the world. When we see all the presents and even all the toys sitting on the shelves in the stores, don't think of what you do not have, but think of the Gift given to us by God our Father. Think of the greatest Gift known to all human beings, the Babe lying in a manger but who is the Ruler of all nations and the Salvation of all creation.

We are waiting for our Savior's arrival, and the voice cries out to us to make the paths straight. Widen the road for Christ to travel upon. We prepare

the way for allowing the Spirit to open our eyes. The Spirit opens our hearts to all possibilities that Christ brings to us. We do not remain idle or lazy. We do not fill our hearts with negative, and allow our minds to dwell of frustration and pain. Let it all go. Let go of all the negativity, all the sin and corruption. Prepare the way. Put ourselves in the position to receive our Savior. We have been waiting for him to arrive, so let us be prepared. Let us be ready to receive him.

**{SLIDE 8}** The Latin word Advent means *arrival* or *coming*, and it is a solid word. It is sure word. Jesus Christ is coming. He will arrive, make no mistake. There is no detour that he will take and be delayed in his arrival. There is no obstacle that blocks his path, so that he will never arrive. Jesus Christ is coming. His advent is a sure thing. He means to approach and make straight our paths. He means to raise us from our low valley and destroy all the mountain in our way. He comes to widen our hearts with love and understand, thanksgiving and joy. He comes to give us glory, so that we may celebrate life in the bad times as well as in the good. The wildernesses in our lives will be transformed to fertile, sunny grounds. Comfort is coming, the comfort that we have been waiting for

for a long time.

## Assurance of Pardon

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” Friends, believe the good news: In Christ you and I are forgiven. Thanks be to God.