



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 15, 2010
Midweek Advent Worship
Sermon Text: [Isaiah 40:1-11](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

Share the Good News

These first 11 verses of Isaiah 40 that we've been looking at in the midweek services form three distinct groups, all with a voice as one of the central things in them. But if you were reading this in the original language, this last section would have jumped out at you as being completely different. It would have said to you that God's trying to get your attention here by saying things a little differently. It starts out in the first section that we looked at in verses 3-5, a voice of one calling in the desert. The first word in the Hebrew is "voice." The second grouping starts out the same way. *"A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?'"* (Isaiah 40:6). This time, however, God has these two parallel phrases that he puts before he talks about the voice. That would be saying to the people that would be hearing this, or reading the scroll of the prophet, that God is saying this is something pretty important, something unusual, something that's important and can't be neglected if you are going to do what God has called you to do. So what is it that God is basically screaming at us, in all capital letters if he was emailing us? What is it he is saying that he wants us to get our attention?

"You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout." (Isaiah 40:9). He tells us something about the voice before he starts talking about it. It's no longer John the Baptist, like it was in the first week. The voice is no longer God, like it was last week. The voice now is of those who bring good tidings to Zion or to Jerusalem, or I think a better way of translating this is, "O Zion, bearer of good tidings," or "O Jerusalem, bearer of good tidings. Get up on a mountain and lift up your voice with a shout." You are now the voice...Zion, Jerusalem, these are Old Testament phrases for God's people, the church. So what he is shouting at us in capital letters is "You are now the voice and you need to get to a place so that everyone can hear you, and you need to speak without fear because you have an important message to share." A message that he says is good tidings, good tidings that need to be heard and need to be shared.

One of these good tidings are about our unique King. He says you need to get there, lift up your voice, don't be afraid, and say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God." You are God's people. You are Zion. You are Jerusalem. So you know who your God is and you know who it is that you believe in. You know who has worked faith in your heart. You know who he is. You may not know everything about him, but you know what you believe. So he is saying, "Here is the voice." It's no longer some goofy guy out in the desert in some funky clothes. It's no longer God himself. Now it's you. You have to point people to your God, and don't be afraid.

When you look at the message that follows saying, "Here is your God," you might start wondering, "Maybe I should be afraid." It says "See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power and his arm" (his arm talks about his strength), "his arm rules for him." If my God is coming in power and I know how often I failed him, you'd think I would be a little bit worried and maybe that's why our God has to say to us, "Don't be afraid," because the message you proclaim is about a king that has power but doesn't use that power in a way to crush people or to bring about his rule through his might. He brings about his rule, our unique King, by being a shepherd, by being gentle, by being loving, by having a deep and abiding concern for the elect, those that are his own, and the deep and abiding concern for those who reject him, because he died for them all.

As the Shepherd, he lives and dies in the place of those he knew would be saved and those he knew would reject him. He lays down his life for the sheep and as you heard Jesus say, "I have other sheep that aren't of this fold, and they need to hear my voice." Isaiah 40 is telling us that we are the voice. We are the ones that are supposed to be sharing it. Here is our unique King. He doesn't extend his rule by his power. Instead, he entrusts the rule of God's grace to us. If you've ever had reason to wonder about the wisdom of God, wouldn't you think this is it?

He died for all people. He won salvation for all people. Then he comes up with a plan to have filthy rotten sinners like you and like me to be the ones to share it? And if we don't share it, it doesn't get shared? There's no backup plan? This is his message? We are his voice? And it says to get on a mountain, get out there and herald it to the people. Don't hoard it for yourself. Don't get in the closet and just whisper it to each other. But get out on the mountain and herald it...that's his command, right? That's the voice that he's supposed be. So what do we do?

At this time of the year, do we get around to telling the people what truly makes Christmas merry? Or are we content with Happy Holidays with gift giving that's superficial and not lasting? Are we telling people the message of the Savior that is born? Are we sharing with people, without fear that our God reigns, here is our God? He came to earth to live in our place, to die in our place, to take away our sins, and now he's entrusted to us the privilege and the joy of sharing this message? Or do we just huddle up in our little spiritual huddle and whisper it back and forth to each other and back and forth to each other and back and forth to each other, and then pat ourselves on our back and say, "God, you're lucky to have us." Scripture has so clearly said, you can't get a whole lot clearer than this, you have to get out on the mountain and let the message be heard by those that are lost, not just nurturing the found, but also reaching out to the lost. In many ways, aren't we just like the people that heard Jesus call himself the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep? We don't say that he's demon possessed and raving mad, but we don't always exactly do what he calls us to do, do we?

Then we say, "God, why aren't you blessing us more? Why are you withholding blessings from our lives? Why is our life at times hard and difficult? Why, O Lord?"

We're kind of just like the Israelites. We chase after other gods and then wonder where the Lord's blessing has gone and what is wrong with God? I guess that's what leads me to sometimes wonder about the wisdom of God's plan. I think he could have gotten a little bit more of a steady voice or a stronger voice than you and me.

Then again, our unique King is wiser than we'll ever be. And as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high and so great is his wisdom above ours. So when you stop to think about it and have to say to yourself, "Is the Lord truly smart entrusting it to fools like us?" You have to end up with the answer that God knows what he is doing. Maybe when he confronts us with a text like this that shows us how shallow sometimes our praise and our service to him is, and we are confronted with that truth and then we see that the Lord doesn't turn his back on us, that he continues to love us, forgive us and embrace us like a lamb in his arms and bring us close to his heart through the Word and through the Sacrament, maybe it's his plan that this changes us and reshapes us and takes us away from the superficial to the meaningful. It takes us away from the temporal to the eternal. It takes us away from the things of this world to the things that truly matter, which is, here is your God. We are the voice. You know the message. We've been given the task. We've been forgiven for the times we've failed. Our God says to us, "Get back on the mountain, lift up your voice, do not be afraid."