



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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December 4, 2011  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
Sermon Text: [Isaiah 40:1-8](#)  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Isaiah 40:1-8](#)  
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 14](#)  
Second Lesson: [2 Peter 3:8-14](#)  
Gospel Lesson: [Mark 1:1-8](#)

### **Get Ready! The Lord of Glory is Coming**

Listen to His Comfort  
Prepare His Way  
Believe His Everlasting Word

You're making a lot of plans during this time of year, aren't you? Where you're going, who is coming to your place, who is hosting whom, what you have to do, what you have to bring...you're making a lot of plans. If you're hosting people, you are also probably doing some work, and hopefully you're starting on it early because if you have a bunch of people coming home for the holidays, you don't really want them to see how you live from day to day, do you? You don't want them to see the stuff that's in the sink, the stuff that's underneath the counter, etc. You kind of want to pretty it up and dress it up so that they don't really see what it looks like. You want to get rid of all the dust bunnies. You want to get rid of all that kind of stuff. That ring around the tub has to be gone. There is all this kind of stuff, if you're having a bunch of people stay at your house, that you have to get rid of. Then the worst part is that you have to keep it clean until they get there. Isn't that the worst part?

We had people coming over to the house yesterday to look at our shower. They were going to look at what work they want to do on it, so Paula, not me, cleaned the shower. I made sure I showered in the basement from then on so I didn't mess up the shower she had worked so hard to clean. That's kind of how it goes.

That's what our God talks to us about today; not cleaning showers, about cleaning ourselves, right? About someone coming and making straight hills, making straight paths for him, and that there is going to be a voice coming that is going to prepare the way for him as we heard about in the Gospel. Then he tells us the best way we can be ready for him and prepare is to pay attention to what is eternal, not what is transitory, not what comes and goes, not ourselves, but pay attention to his eternal Word. Our God comes to us today and says the Lord of glory is coming. Get ready. Get ready by focusing on the comfort he offers. Get ready by focusing on repenting and preparing the way. Get ready by believing his everlasting Word.

If you've ever read the Book of Isaiah and you've read it through, this section that I just read to you, the start of Chapter 40, really marks a change. The first 39 chapters are often called the first Book of Isaiah because they are so different in tone. It's the warning to God's people that unless they repent, they are going to go off into captivity. There is certainly Gospel in the beginning. There's the promises of the Savior that

would be born to the virgin and all these things. The Gospel is there, but overwhelmingly the message is one of Law, to turn away from your sin, because if you don't, you are going to go into exile.

Starting in Chapter 40, we get to the second Book of Isaiah in a sense, and Isaiah changes his tone. He starts out with *"Comfort, comfort my people,"*... say to her that *"her hard service has been completed."* He is now writing to the people that would be 70 years down the road, who had spent 70 years in captivity because they didn't listen to the prophet say that God was going to take them away into the Babylonian captivity. Now he is writing to comfort those who are troubled by the fact that God did what he said he was going to do.

He writes to give them comfort and give them hope. The message was God is coming with his salvation. God is coming with his comfort. Your time in captivity is going to have an end. You will get to go back to Jerusalem. *"Proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."* One thing to note in that comfort that God offers the people that were going to be living in captivity...it says *"her sin has been paid for."* It wasn't those 70 years in captivity (there, ✓, that's done, now that's paid for all the times you've ignored God and did the things God said not to do), it's not that they had paid for their sin of ignoring God and his Word and his prophets; God has paid for their sin. They received from the Lord's hand. The Lord paid for the sin and the Lord gives back a double blessing. That would be true for the people that would return from exile.

But there is another fulfillment in this prophecy that God himself ties to the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus coming into the world. The comfort that we have is that our sins have been paid for because we are no different than those people that lived in the Southern Kingdom of Judah at that time. We ignore God's Word. We are busy with day-to-day life and we don't always make time for God, especially at this time of the year. We are chasing our tails and all of a sudden we forget that the reason we are celebrating Christmas is because God came to save fools like us. We forget that truth. We focus on ourselves. We focus on who we are and what we do. And if we do take the time to spend time in his Word, then sometimes Satan gets in our head and even messes that up in our own minds and we think "God must love me more than he loves the people that don't do this." It's great that we spend time with God. It's great that we focus on him, but we do it because he loved us first and he took away our sins first.

God is reminding us that he has done the work. We haven't done the work. He has done the work of our redemption. He has taken away our sins. He has given us double blessing, double for all our sins. He took them away. He didn't just take away eternal death. He gave us eternal life. He tells us heaven is ours through the life and death of Jesus. He wants us to get ready by focusing on that comfort that he provides.

One of the ways we can focus on the comfort he provides is by looking at how incapable of it we ourselves are, by preparing in the desert a way. Again, this kind of

has a double fulfillment. The first section was kind of God's message that he wanted all the prophets to speak to his people. Now he goes to a singular voice, *"A voice of one calling: 'In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.'"* What this meant for the exiles who were living in Babylon is this; the normal trade route took them way to the north and then back down to the south to Judea. When God says make a straight way in the wilderness so they can come straight home, he's talking about the day will come when your deliverance will be imminent, that it's at hand, that God is going to do it in a way that reveals his glory. He did it in how he allowed Cyrus to take over and then Cyrus released them and sent them home at various times so they could rebuild Jerusalem. God's glory is revealed because he called Cyrus by name hundreds of years before it happened. *"The glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

He talks about making a straight highway, raising up valleys, mountains and hills made low, rough ground becoming level, rugged places a plain. There's a whole lot of construction going on here, but it's saying it's imminent and God would deliver them imminently.

But as we saw in our Gospel, this voice of one calling in the desert is also John the Baptist. There's a fulfillment not just for the exiles, which it certainly spoke of, but a fulfillment for all people of all time. That's John the Baptist who comes, and the highway that he makes straight, the rugged places he makes plain, the rough ground that he makes level, the mountain that he makes low, the valley that he raises up, that's us. Our rugged places, our mountains, our rough ground is ourselves, our sins, our thinking we can do it on our own, the idea that God owes us something because we've done something for him, the idea that God owes us happiness or things like that in this world when he himself has told us through much suffering we'll enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God tells us in a sinful world things won't always be perfect. He tells us one of the things that clearly is not perfect is when we look at our own hearts. We think we know better than God, don't we at times? Don't we at times think "God, why did you let this happen? Why would you let that happen?" Don't we really think, "God, if I were God, I would do things better than you?" That's kind of the nature of having a sinful heart, which is what each of us has.

That's what God has to do major construction on. It's done. It's urgent work that needs to be done. It's done through repentance. John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. My repenting does not make it easier for my God to save me. My repenting just turns me away from my sin. I can be turned away from my sin and not know my salvation, like Judas. He turned away from his sin, but he didn't believe that Christ was his Savior, so he went out and hung himself. My turning away from my sin does not forgive me. The work that forgives me is Christ. Christ's work forgives me in that he did the work to live and die and take away my sins. He gave me the gift of faith that lays hold of the truth that yes, I'm sorry for my sin, but he

did the heavy construction work of leading me to believe that Jesus is my personal Savior, to see that God has lived and died perfectly in my place and took away all those times that I thought I knew better than God. He has done the same for you.

God's got a lot of work to do because at times, as sinners, our hearts get set on things that are not pleasing to our God. Because we have that sinful nature, we often rebel and turn away from what God says clearly in his Word because we think we know better. So this repentance is urgent work. It's work that needs to be done now. It's work that is at hand. And it's work that needs to be done day after day after day in our lives. We might not like it that we have to look at ourselves and see our sins, but we need it so we truly appreciate our God, so that we don't think we can do all this construction work on our own, so that we don't try to get ready by ourselves, so we get ready through the work of God, Jesus living and dying in our place, the Holy Spirit giving us the gift of faith, to help us do that daily. This is what our God wants us to do daily...a life of daily contrition and repentance, as Luther put it.

God gives us a third voice. The prophet writes "A voice says, 'Cry out.'" And then the prophet Isaiah says, "What shall I cry?" Then the mouth of our God tells him, "Here is the message you need to share with people. When they are getting ready for the Lord's coming, here's what they need to know. *All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.*" If we are going to get ready, we can't rely on ourselves. We can't rely on someone else. We can't rely on each other to do it. We rely on each other to point us to God, who does it for us. The only way you and I can serve one another in a way that is eternally lasting is by pointing one another to the Word of God. If we point each other to "Well, it seems to me things will be alright," we are just grass. Grass is here and it's gone. It withers. It dries up. It shrivels. It blows away. That's us. But the Word of our God stands forever. So if we want to offer to one another the true power to be ready for the Lord's coming, you and I need to know the Word of God. You and I need to breath the Word of God. You and I need to speak the Word of God. It has to be a part of our thought process. It has to be a part of our speech pattern. It has to flow from us just as certainly as we inhale and exhale. We need to know that Word of God, which means that we need to get ready by studying that Word of God so that we have something more to offer than "Hang in there. It will get better." We can offer to one another, "God says, *'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'*" ([Hebrews 13:5](#).) We can offer to one another "*we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" ([Romans 8:37-39](#).)

Those words are power. Those are the words the Lord has given to each and every Christian to know and to speak to one another and to encourage one another with. Those are the words that endure forever. Our ideas, our thoughts, our strength, they come and they go. But the power that is in the Word of God, that's eternal. That's the

power that has saved us. It's the message of the Gospel. That's the power that shows us our sin. It's there in the Law. That's the power that moves us to live for our God to thank him that he has given us eternal life. That's what moves us to want to know this Word and to share this Word with one another. Then, the opportunities to get to know our God better, whether it's with other Christians in worship, whether it's with other Christian's in Bible Study, whether it's by ourselves as we search the Scriptures individually, they don't become a *have to* thing that we check off and say "Now God owes me something." They become a *want to* thing, because I want to know my God better and I want to have his power in my life. It comes through his Spirit. When it does, we are clean, and we are ready when our eternal visitor comes on the Last Day.