

Comfort comfort, now my people, says The Prophet Isaiah.

At the beginning of Isaiah chapter 40,
a new day is dawning.

Chapters 1- through 39 were proclaimed
in order to help Israel deal with a truly tragic situation.

Early in the sixth century BC,
the powerful Babylonian empire
had invaded the land of Israel.

The heavily armed and successful invaders
had burned Jerusalem Temple to the ground,
taken all its wealth
and many of its best inhabitants.
and brought them to a foreign capital
waaaay across the Fertile Crescent
Which arcs hundreds and hundreds of miles
across the Middle East.

BABYLON was a Legend in her own time,
A splendid city
with hanging gardens
and palaces
and concert halls,
and plenty of government officials.

But to the Israelites,
it was a high class prison.

For that generation
and the ones that followed,
there was a deep longing
to return to the land
that they thought God had given them.

So, the suffering and sins
that Isaiah talks about as being ended,
were primarily internal.

I would call them a severe case
of mental anguish, and guilt, and regret.

So what is God's solution for this situation?

Other prophets had said
"hey get used to it."
"man up"
"seek the good of the city
in which you dwell—
don't think about going anywhere else
because God has placed you here."

But not Isaiah.
It's taken 39 chapters to get there —
but he is convinced
that God is going to act.

The prophet is absolutely sure
that God is sending someone
to save the day.

That is the magic portal
from Isaiah in the sixth century to Jesus
Six hundred years later.

That door is John the Baptist.

We'll talk about him next week.

But in the meantime
I want to lay this in front of you.

Where is your Babylonian captivity today?
Where do you need comfort?
To put it another way,
where do you not yet see God at work?

Wherever that is
I want you to stay there for a while.

The season of Advent is about "staying there."

Not rushing too quickly toward Christmas morning
And brightly sung carols ,
and little baby Jesus in the manger.

The music today is uplifting,
And the high potluck to come will be marvelous,
I'm told.

But even after this lessons and carols service,
and after high potluck,
we need to stay here
in this desert
in this captivity
in this our need
a little longer.

If only so that we can understand
who we are in God's eyes –
that is beloved,
perfect,
Home.

And we can understand what God is saving us from,
meaninglessness,
confusion,
violence,
anger.

Stay with me another three weeks.
It will be a Journey worth taking.

As Isaiah says
it will be a highway for our God –
not just a place for God to come to us,
but a place for us to walk to God.

Walk with us this Advent, God.

Help us journey from captivity to freedom,
From sorrow to joy,
From this world to you.

Amen.

