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*Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December – The Second Sunday of Advent*

*Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11 & Mark 1:1-8*

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## **Isaiah 40:1-11**

### **Comfort for God's people**

Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and 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.

A voice of one calling:

'In the wilderness prepare  
the way for the Lord;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,  
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

A voice says, 'Cry out.'

And I said, 'What shall I cry?'

'All people are like grass,  
and all their faithfulness 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 endures for ever.'

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,  
lift it up, do not be afraid;  
say to the towns of Judah,  
'Here is your God!'  
See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,  
and he rules with a mighty arm.  
See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.  
He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
he gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.

## Mark 1:1-8

### **John the Baptist prepares the way**

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

'I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way' –  
'a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
"Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him."'

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: 'After

me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

## Reflection

This Lectionary Reflection is based on both scripture readings; from the prophet Isaiah and the gospel of Mark.

God, through the prophet Isaiah, calls out: *"Clear the way!"* (Isaiah 40:3 NLT). John the Baptist, quoting Isaiah, declares: *"Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him"* (Mark 1:3 NLT).

These commands are SHOUTED, not whispered! They are a top priority, they are urgent, they require planning and preparation.

*"Make the road straight and smooth, a highway fit for our God. Fill in the valleys, level off the hills, smooth out the ruts, clear out the rocks."* (Isaiah 40:3-5 The Message).

Isaiah's words are promising the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. Mark's words echo this.

They are also words of comfort. They are tender words about forgiveness, care and the ending of 'sad days'. They are words that speak of Jesus: *"He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart."* (Isaiah 40:11). The promise of grace, mercy and forgiveness.

However, we need to pause and reflect on the urgency of this call to prepare for the coming of Jesus. In a similar way to which we prepare for Christmas this year.

At Christmas we celebrate Jesus' coming, remembering that first Advent. This year, due to Covid-19, things will be somewhat different but we will still need to prepare – plan meals, buy presents and send cards etc.

But there is another coming to prepare for. We need to be ready for a new wave of the Holy Spirit!

Many church leaders are sensing that a powerful move of the Spirit is coming. They are believing that throughout this pandemic God has been at work. He has been preparing his Church for a new outpouring of his love and power. I want to be part of this – do you?

When we look back at this period in history may it be known not as a time of pandemic but as an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We need to be ready, to be prepared – through prayer, confession of sin, fasting and living lives of integrity.

We are being called to make the Kingdom of God our priority – see Matthew 6:33. We are to act with urgency, believing that this is our time, our opportunity! We are being prepared for what God is doing and going to do.

A sign of this was when musicians and worship leaders from churches across the nation came together to produce the video 'Blessing UK'. Later, St Paul's Church produced its own version. The song speaks of God's blessing toward us and the nation. Here are the words:

*The Lord bless you  
And keep you  
Make his face shine upon you  
And be gracious to you  
The Lord turn his  
Face toward you  
And give you peace*

*Amen, amen, amen...*

*May his favour be upon you  
And a thousand generations  
And your family and your children  
And their children...*

Let's be ready!

*"Clear the way!" (Isaiah 40:3 NLT).*

*"Prepare the way for the Lord's coming! Clear the road for him" (Mark 1:3 NLT).*

Peter Sanderson