

Scripture Readings and Sermon

December 6, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Isaiah 40:1–11 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Isaiah 40 is a continuation of the theme introduced in chapter 35. It should be noted that Isaiah 36-39 is a retelling of 2 Kings 18:13-20:19 and simply provides a historical flashback to the fall of Jerusalem. Isaiah 35 begins "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad" which is echoed in Isaiah 40:3 "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD'". Isaiah 35:8 also speaks of "A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way" just as Isaiah 40:3 continues with "make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Connecting Isaiah 35 with 40 would also explain why Jesus in Matthew 11:4 quoted Isaiah 35:5-6 and then referred to John as the one "who will prepare your way before you" alluding to Isaiah 40:3. By introducing the 2 Kings flashback, Isaiah forces the reader to wait for, as Paul Harvey would say, "rest of the story". Even in the middle of the wilderness, a voice can be heard crying out. The Holy Way will be made straight so that all can find their way. The words of comfort are words of a promise about to be fulfilled, a people about to be delivered.

Isaiah 40:4 "the rough places a plain."

Do you believe that everyone has room to grow and improve - even Christians?

What 'rough places' in your life does the Lord need to smooth?

Is it easy to smooth the rough places that give us 'character'?

What rough places are you holding onto even though God wants to smooth them?

Are you willing to let them go to make room for the Christ child?

Commentary on Mark 1:1–8 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Unlike the other gospels which dwell on the origins of Jesus (Luke - Mary, Matthew - Joseph, John - Divinity), Mark begins with the ministry of Jesus starting with John the Baptist. The first words of Mark proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Even Mark's inclusion of John the Baptist is less about John and more about John proclaiming Jesus. Mark tells us nothing of John's parentage, his disciples, or his conflict with the temple authorities. For Mark, John is the trumpet God uses to proclaim the arrival of Jesus. The fact that John is associated with Isaiah 40:3 points to the early Christian understanding that the Jewish people never did fully return from their exile but have been waiting for a Messiah (Hebrew) / Christ (Greek) to lead them home. The good news is that the exile is now over. Pack your bags, we are going home!

Mark 1:2 "I am sending my messenger ahead of you"

Is the Bible a "messenger" of God or just a historical document?

If it is a messenger, how often do you listen to the message?

When was the last time you read the Bible as if God was speaking to you?

When has the Bible "prepared the way" for an experience of Jesus in your life?

How will you let the Bible prepare you this Advent season?

Commentary on 2 Peter 3:8–15a (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

In order to understand why we should "regard the patience of our Lord as salvation", we must fully appreciate the term "the day of the Lord". According to the prophets, the day of the Lord is when the full wrath of the Lord is unleashed. "That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of retribution, to gain vindication from his foes." (Jeremiah 46:10) - "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near-- a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness!" (Joel 2:2) "See, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to

make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it." (Isaiah 13:9) After these references, one can understand when Amos says "Why do you want the day of the LORD?"(5:18) This is why Peter says that the delay of the Lord is not slowness but "is patient with you". It is God's mercy that gives us time to prepare our hearts and lives for the Lord's return. Judgment, however, will come and so the call of Advent and Lent is to be prepared.

2 Peter 3:11 "what sort of persons ought you to be"

Do you try to live up to your image of your parents or grandparent? Friends? Celebrities?

How does your role model look in the light of scriptures?

Rather than trying to live like someone else, what if we asked God who we were created to be?

Who is God calling you to become?

Does it surprise you to know that God is waiting for you?

Sermon **"Prepare the Way"** ([*Sermon Video*](#))

There is an old saying from Zen philosophy often quoted in popular culture is that it is hard to fill a cup that is already full. The same can be said concerning our hearts at Christmas. It is hard to welcome Jesus into your life when the "inn" of your heart is already full. It is not simply the busyness of the season with shopping, cooking, and decorating but it is full of Christmas past and of the Christmas yet to come. Trying to relive the memories of the past or trying just as hard to forget them can fill our hearts. Facing an uncertain future can cause some to worry if this is the last Christmas together. Regrets, worries, expectations, and disappointments can fill our inn so that there is no room for the Christ child to be born.

The Lord says in Isaiah, "Comfort, O Comfort my people!". The past has been paid for twice over. If we have faith that our sins are truly forgiven and that we can be born again then why do we let the ghosts of the past fill our inn. We can never recreate our 'perfect' Christmas of the past because it is only perfect in the rear view mirror. Neither can we redo our past mistakes and lost Christmases that we wish we had because all of that is in the past. Too many people try to have a Christmas "like Grandma" or the ones on Hallmark. If we fail to let go of the past then we have nothing with which to grab a hold of the present. Faith is the act of giving to God our past so that we might receive the gift of the present.

If faith trusting the promises of God and letting go of the past then hope is a living expression of God's blessing assurance. This assurance allows us to let go of our worries about what might be or what could happen. Jesus is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. Whatever happens in the future, we know that Jesus is already there. If 2020 has taught the world anything it is that the future is uncertain and unpredictable. Our best plans and greatest experts can not accurately predict the future. Only God knows the road ahead and the Lord has prepared the way. Our hope is not in human estimates but the Word of God which stands forever.

And so with the inn of our hearts emptied by faith of the ghosts of the past and by hope of the worries about the future, we finally have ears to hear the messenger of the Lord cry out "Prepare the way of the Lord". Prepare for the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. Prepare for the love of God that heals the broken and comforts the afflicted. Prepare for the Christ child that changes everything for the better. Taking one day at a time and remembering to live into the love of God we just may discover a new patience and peace with ourselves and with those rushing around us. It is when our hearts are open that the joy of Christmas can fill us. So prepare the way, empty your cups, and let the Lord fill them with the water of life.