

South Woodham Ferrers 6th December 2020
OS 435

Come thou long expected Jesus (the skit guys) <https://youtu.be/VLcTLCCpI5A>

A voice cries out:

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

Sing, read or listen to: StF 188 There's a light upon the mountain
<https://youtu.be/yuvbW7gVwal>

Let us pray:

God, you came to your people in the past.
Through the wilderness, you guided them;
When they were lost, you searched for them;
When they were in exile, you brought them back home.

For your love which stays close: We praise you, God.

God, you come to your people now.
In our worship, you speak to us;
In our journey through life, you go with us;
When we look for a way, we see it in Jesus.

For your love which stays close: We praise you, God.

God, you will come to your people in the future.
When times are uncertain, your promises remain;
Your kingdom will come, on earth as in heaven;
Your whole creation will be made new.

For your love which stays close: We praise you, God. Amen (Jarvis & Pickard)

Read: Isaiah 40 1-9

Sing, read or listen to: StF 180 O come O come Emmanuel <https://youtu.be/kKu0or0t8Uw>
Comfort, comfort my people, says your God

We all want comfort at times, don't we? During lockdown we have all come to appreciate how much we value the simple comfort of human contact, touch and embrace. We have all been saddened by the stories in the news of people who have been together for many years, only to be physically separated from loved ones during the pandemic.

Perhaps this can give us a taste of the experience of the people of God in exile. Cut off from all that was familiar and most of all feeling cut off from God. They wonder if God has abandoned them and lament that Jerusalem is like a woman with no one to comfort her (Lamentations).

God responds to this wondering and lament by speaking those words “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God”. It is easy to interpret this as being words of comfort spoken to them and to us. As if God is saying “there, there, it will be alright”.

But no, this is not a sentence from God saying “I am comforting you” it is a commission, a call to do work on behalf of God. God is calling on his people to be the comforters – to go out and comfort others. God goes on in the following verses to expound how this can be done.

Speak tenderly, cry out, bring good news. We are called to be proclaimers of the good news to all around us in these dark times. In just the same way as the prophet Isaiah, we are living in the present while looking forward.

Isaiah is forth telling the coming of John the Baptist and other prophets who will call out God’s message in the wilderness places. He is also stating the message of love that will bring Jesus to us in his birth at Bethlehem. The comfort that is coming to us (now and in the future) has nothing to do with what we deserve. Despite everyone’s failings and wrongdoing, despite all that has made us turn away from God, God loves us and will give us relief.

It is easy, isn’t it, to want to comfort those who are suffering through no fault of their own. But what if the person has done wrong and is suffering for it? Justice says that they deserve what they get. But God speaks these gracious words – God will provide comfort for those who have wronged her/him. This reading is part of Isaiah which is a prophecy but also a love song. A song that radiates hope to people who are caught up in the belief that they are unworthy, dragged down, unseen.

And our task? It is to sing that song too! To speak tenderly to those who are suffering, to cry with them and help to make their cry heard. And we are to bring the good news – hope – the ability to look forward to the day when Jesus is King over everything and everyone. The day when God’s plan for us is completed.

Let us pray:

Come, reveal yourself within our world, Lord.
Come with your message of justice and peace:
to the poor and exploited:
to lives overshadowed by conflict.

Loving God: **Help us prepare the way for Christ.**

Come, reveal yourself in our community, Lord.
Come with your friendship and concern:

to the lonely and unloved;
to lives overshadowed by suffering.

Loving God: **Help us prepare the way for Christ.**

Come, reveal yourself in the church, Lord.
Come with the gift of your Holy Spirit:
to both young and old on the journey of faith;
to lives overshadowed with doubt.

Loving God: **Help us prepare the way for Christ.**

Come, reveal yourself in human lives, Lord.
Come with the offer of salvation:
to the sinner and the seeker;
to lives overshadowed with emptiness.

Loving God: **Help us prepare the way for Christ.**

Come, that we may know you with us in our need, Lord.
Come with all-sufficient love:
to the sick and the anxious;
to lives overshadowed with sorrow.

Loving God: **Help us prepare the way for Christ.**

By our words, prayers and actions,

Loving God: **Help us prepare the way for Christ. Amen**

Read, sing or listen to: StF 177 Lo he comes with clouds descending
https://youtu.be/Qne_0KAU1p4