

Advent 2017

Week Two

Monday, December 11

Comfort, O comfort my people!

Prayers for candle-lighting

I will listen to what the Lord God is saying;

for he is speaking peace to his faithful people who turn their hearts to him;

[Light the candle]

The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our Lord God will stand forever.

I will listen to what the Lord God is saying;

for he is speaking peace to his faithful people who turn their hearts to him.

Isaiah 40:1-2, 6a, 8

Comfort, O comfort my people,

says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,

and cry to her

that she has served her term,

that her penalty is paid...

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"...

The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our God will stand forever.

Imagine yourself as one of God's people living in exile for decades in Babylon in the sixth century BCE. The prophet Isaiah has already written powerfully about God's judgment of Israel for its past unfaithfulness. The people refused to trust in the Lord's providence and made unwise political decisions. These actions ultimately resulted in Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the deportation of a large part of the population to Babylon.

But among these many harsh words of divine judgment, the prophet also sprinkled reminders about God's continuing promises to the people. Jerusalem will one day become the seat of the Lord's reign over all the nations, who will stream to Zion's mountaintop to learn God's ways and walk in the paths of the Lord.

In today's passage, God offers words of comfort to God's people. We might paraphrase God's words like this: "your time of punishment for unfaithfulness has reached its end. My earlier promises to you are still trustworthy because my word stands forever." The people's return from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem has always been assured, but is now close at hand!

For Reflection

Just like the exiles in Babylon, from time to time we find ourselves in a place of confusion or sorrow because we've made unwise decisions or choices. Yet God's word of promise for forgiveness and renewed life comforts us and gives us hope. When in your life have you heard the Lord's words of comfort in the midst of difficult

circumstances?

The people of Israel did in fact return to Jerusalem as God promised and began rebuilding the Temple. Their experience proved yet again the steadfast reliability of God's word. When in your life has God's word proven to be reliable and trustworthy despite adverse circumstances?