

## **THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF WEST TEXAS**

**Advent II -Sunday, December 10**

**Readings: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8**

*If you have a home Advent wreath, the following simple liturgy for lighting the second candle on your wreath will guide you each day this week. The liturgy is drawn from our readings for this second week in Advent.*

### **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.

### **Interpreting the Readings**

We hear several important themes emerge from our readings this week: God speaks words of comfort to God's people in exile, reminding them that even in the midst of suffering, God's promises are irrevocable and will ultimately be honored; and that during their patient waiting for those promises to be fulfilled, the people must have time to prepare themselves for the Lord's return by turning their hearts back to God and living holy and godly lives.

Once again, as with last week, our readings take us into two distinct time periods:

- the time in the sixth century BCE, when the exiled citizens of Judea, hoping to return to Jerusalem and their homeland after decades of exile in Babylon, hear a comforting word of the Lord from Isaiah: their restoration to Jerusalem is close at hand, and God is about to honor earlier promises that Jerusalem will be the place from which God's holy instruction will go out to all the nations,
- and the first century CE, when John the Baptist comes to Judea to prepare people to encounter God's new plan for restoration in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (witnessed in the reading from the Gospel of Mark); and a later follower of Jesus, writing in the name of Peter, offers a word of comfort to God's people, encouraging them to continue living faithfully as they wait patiently for, and also hasten, the day of God's final and just judgment of the world.

Writing over the course of several centuries of turbulent times for Israel and Judah, Isaiah is both the prophet of God's judgment and the prophet of hope in God's promises. We see both of these dimensions of his prophecy reflected in today's reading.

As the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams once wrote, God's judgment is always intended to be creative by leading us to the amendment of our lives. Today's reading from Isaiah also affirms that God's promises are irrevocable, even if they are not immediately fulfilled. That affirmation is our source for hope in life renewed and restored through the power of God.

In today's reading from Mark, written around the year 70CE, the author grounds the good news of his gospel of Jesus Christ in the prophet Isaiah's word of hope. God is intervening in the world to show people a new way of life that will give them hope for restored life in the midst of suffering. In the second letter of Peter, written toward the end of the first century, the author reminds the followers of Jesus that God's time is not our time. We must wait patiently on the Lord's timing for things. That said, though, Peter also acknowledges that we can hasten the return of our Lord by living holy and godly lives.

### **For Reflection**

As you enter this season of Advent, reflect on your life with Christ and God in a community with others. When, where, and how do you experience God's creative word in your life?

When, where and how does God provide you with hope that God's promises will be honored?