

Isaiah 40:1-11

Our scripture reading for today, comes from the middle of the book of Isaiah. Scholars believe that there were actually three writers for the book of Isaiah. The first writer warns the King and the people, not to trust in other nations - nor should they trust in their own strength.

Then Israel is invaded and destroyed by Babylon - and the majority of the people are taken into slavery in Babylon. Second Isaiah, the part that begins with our verses today.... Second Isaiah is written after the people have been in slavery in Babylon for a couple of generations. But now they are being set free. They are preparing to return to Israel.

And a voice from heaven says, "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain.

Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together".

God is building a highway through the wilderness. After a long long time of suffering and fear, God is cutting through the mountains and building bridges across

the valleys. God is coming to God's people and - "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together."

Currently, we are going through a very rough time in this world. It seems as though the enemy is winning. ISIS continues to slaughter people - and the nations are divided about how exactly to fight them. Terrorists are striking at the heart of a peaceful Europe - slaughtering the people of Paris.

And in the United States, we continue to have individuals slaughtering scores of innocent people. One mass shooting after another. A mass shooting is where four or more people are shot at one time. And, on National Public Radio the other day they said that there have been 353 mass shootings in the United States this year. That is more than one mass shooting in the United States every day.

Everyone is talking about it. Terrorism - gun violence. We are disturbed. We are deeply disturbed. It is all just a bit overwhelming.

We are living, in the wilderness, of these modern times.

But then we hear these words from the prophet Isaiah, written 25 centuries ago, and they are exactly the words that we need to hear. "Comfort, O comfort my people."

A voice from heaven says, "Cry out!" "Preach to God's people!" And I say, "What shall I preach?"

"All people are like grass. The grass withers and the grass fades.... but the Word of God will stand forever."

God is coming with an awesome power that will transform the nations. God is coming with an awesome power that will transform our nation. And God is coming with an awesome power that will transform your life and your reality.

But just like the coming of Jesus, God is not coming with the power, of more jets, to send bombs upon our enemies. God is not coming with more guns so that every single person in the world is armed to the teeth - so that any one of us could shoot at the slightest provocation.

No, God is coming with the transforming power of love - the power of grace and understanding. God is coming with a power that causes you to pause, when you are about to curse and try to destroy your enemy. God is coming with the power to make each nation ask themselves why are these people this way?

They are angry because of injustice by their own rulers. They are angry because they have no jobs, no income. They are desperate - and so, some flee to ISIS out

of desperation and anger. Others flee from civil war - out of fear and desperation and hunger.

Yes, our society and our nation and the world - we are travelling through the wilderness of these present times. But the answer is not to fear - the answer is to hope. To trust that God will bring us through.

God has brought us through all of the worst parts of history - as terrible as they were - those times all ended. Our Revolutionary War with England lasted 8 years. Now England is our greatest ally.

The Civil War lasted 4 horrible years. But they ended - and now we are the single greatest nation on earth.

The First World War lasted 4 years. But it ended.

The Second World War lasted 6 years - 4 years for America. But it ended. And now Europe has bonded into one large economic unit. After the war, we gave an astounding amount of financial assistance to our enemies, Germany and Japan. They rebuilt their nations, and now Germany and Japan are among our greatest allies.

After World War II, we also gave generous educational opportunities to our veterans of that war - and they became the most educated population in history.... creating universities and prosperity in this nation which is the envy of the world.

Some of you may remember the Cold War that lasted about half of the last century. We were almost certain that the world was going to end in a thermonuclear holocaust. But at its end, the Soviet Union fell apart. And some of you may remember, that West Germany sacrificed greatly to reunify with the extremely impoverished East Germany. An astounding grace and sacrifice. And no bombs ever fell.

And so, in this moment of fearfulness - in our nation and in the world - you may be tempted to despair. To think that we are doomed to live in a world of violence and chaos. But God will bring us through. The power of Love - the power of grace and understanding always triumphs over the power of evil. Always has - always will.

And through all of these fears and challenges, we will again rediscover who we are - not only as a nation that values freedom and opportunity for all people. Through all of these fears and challenges, through this time of wilderness - we will rediscover who we are, as the people of God.

We will continue to love - in spite of the thugs - whether in our nation or in the world. We will love our families. We will love our neighbors.... and we will even love the stranger. In the Name of Jesus Christ.

And that love will transform the world and transform
your life at the same time.

Amen