



## SERMONS THAT WORK

### Advent 2 Year B

#### The Rule of God, for Us

[RCL] Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

*Comfort, O comfort.* There is so much need for comfort in this world of heartbreak where we find ourselves. Every day, we hear new stories of how we have failed each other, how we have used our talents, gifts, power, and position to maneuver our way to “success” at the expense of so many others. We have so completely fallen for this version of the world that we expect losers and winners at every turn. If you are not a winner, you are a loser. If not a loser, a winner, and the winners get to be in charge. They get to use their power to remind everyone else who is on top. In this way, living in this kind of world, we can relate to the exiled community of Israelites. The Babylonians were clearly the winners of this power struggle; they used their power to take over and kick out the losers. They used their power to enact laws that undermined the foundations of the Jewish people, their culture, and their faith. They used their power to proclaim again and again that *they* were the winners. Despite all of this, feeling forgotten and alone, strangers in a strange land, God was with God’s people. God did not abandon them.

*Comfort, O Comfort.* The prophet has given many commands in this passage, but the first was to comfort. To be human is to be vulnerable. This vulnerability leaves us with many reasons to need comfort. We are hurt – physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. The community to which Isaiah was called was an especially vulnerable community, suffering the effects of years in exile. Though most of us may never understand that form of vulnerability, we can all acknowledge our need for comfort in the midst of our variety of vulnerabilities. Yet, what is especially interesting to notice is that God does not call for comfort alone. Specifically, we are not meant to get comfortable, but to *be comforted* so we can then be moved into action. The way of the Lord is prepared in the midst of our mutual suffering. In our compassion for one another, the way of the Lord is made clear. The Good News breaks through with the promise of new life and a new way of being together.

*Lift up your voice.* From comfort, God’s people are called into action. Not just any action, but an action of proclamation and gathering together, centered on the unwavering promises of God. This call to action is for the whole body, not just a few specially gifted wordsmiths. What would it mean for us to take this call to lift our voices seriously? What keeps us as a community from unabashedly proclaiming the Good News of God *for us*? Too often, we allow our individualism and busyness to distract us from the call of God to a life of community. Our individual calendars and task lists put the proclamation of Good News low on the priority list. How often is proclamation honestly discussed together in congregational meetings or when organizing the yearly budget? This is a challenge that brings us to a variety of excuses, often using other words from scripture that allude to spiritual gifts or priestly duties. Yet again, we use our individuality to

shield us from the very real call to gather and proclaim. Perhaps this is why following closely after the call to lift up our voices (with strength!) the prophet adds, “Do not fear.”

*Say and see; the Lord God comes.* God’s word, God’s promises, will stand forever. Here, as we rise to the call to action, we are given a vision of God arriving to fulfill God’s promises. These promises come by way of God’s might, but God’s might is not what we would think. God’s might is not wielded in the same manner of the winners of this world. Although a glorious promise, herein lies another challenge. Will we recognize and accept this kind of power, this new world to come? The truth is, we like being winners. While we may not always find ourselves in the winner’s circle, we enjoy the idea of being there someday. The rules are easier to understand in a world where there are winners and losers. In this world, we also retain our control, or at least our idea of control. If we are honest, we also like this version of the world because we can believe that we do not have to rely on anyone but ourselves. Yet, in today’s word from Isaiah, we hear clearly that God promises a world reliant on God. It is God who will gather us, care for us, and lead us home.

*The Lord God comes with might.* We rely on God’s might, under the rule of God’s arm. This rule is powerful but does not warp power in the same ways we are used to. Instead, the rule and power of God are about restoration. The rule of God’s arm brings recompense. [Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com) defines recompense in two ways: “To pay or give compensation for; make restitution or requital for (damage, injury, or the like),” and, “To make compensation for something; repay someone.” One can imagine that this is an especially powerful word for a community in exile. In what ways do you need the promise of recompense? In what ways does our world need the promise of God’s rule? Though challenging to our current way of life, we hear the cry for recompense echoing on city streets, barren farmlands, school classrooms, concert venues, and country churches. One thing is certain: our world needs a God of comfort and justice. *That* is Good News for which we are to hope. *That* is Good News to proclaim.

*God’s rule for us.* God’s rule is a promise. This is a promise to a scattered community, crying out in loss and pain. This is a promise that is not dependent on winners and losers, but dependent on the very being – the essence – of our God. The reward is our reliance on a trustworthy God who never leaves God’s people, no matter how bad things may get. In fact, our God enters into even the worst places of our world to gather and lead the beloved community into new life together, time and time again. This truth is where we find our comfort and hope. This truth is what we are called to proclaim to all because it is a truth for all. God’s might and reward are not for winners or losers, but for all. Our scripture today closes with the beautiful image of the new way of life under God’s rule, where we are gathered, held close, fed, and led gently. As a song goes, “Home is wherever I’m with you.” May we, along with the exiled peoples of the past and present, hold fast to the promise of our God, who comes to gather us home. It is this promise of home that we await in this Advent season, preparing for the Savior to come, born a loser in this world, to hang out with losers of this world, named Emmanuel, God with us, so that we may find home in God, with us, for us.

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