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Isaiah 40:1-11
December 8, 2017

I was anxious and worried about my family since violence has erupted in West Bank and Gaza, particularly in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. I was comforted by some of you and my friends and my bishop who called me to check on my family and me. Words of comfort, prayer, and support have calmed me down. Giving comforting words or gestures of support to those who are stressed can make a big difference in their lives.

God wants to make diffidence in the life of the Israelites who live in the exile. God shows compassion to them by preparing the highway for the Jews to go back to Jerusalem. Isaiah declares the sound of joy when he says "comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem." Isaiah draws an image of God in God's heavenly court "The Lord has 'taken counsel' as to the best course of action and sends his emissaries accordingly."¹ God speaks tenderly and comforts God's people after God discipline them for their sins.

God prepare a highway for the returnees to use when they return to Zion. This road is free from any obstacle. By the way, this is a figurative language and should not be taken at its face value. In return, the Israelites need to plan appropriate spiritual preparation. Isaiah writes a joyful poem describing the returnees' participating in a festival journey. Isaiah is inviting them to make a spiritual and joyful preparation. Isaiah recalls the joyous procession of Babylonians as they were carrying their gods marching to their temples; this joyful procession also resembles the parade

¹ Motyer, J. Alec. The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary (p. 299). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

for visiting dignitaries.² The main point is that the Israelites need to make spiritual preparation for God's arrival.

God paved the highway for the Israelites to go to Jerusalem but they cry out because they are weak. They are fragile like grass. The road to Jerusalem is difficult, but Isaiah tells the Israelites, yes we are fragile, but God is strong. Isaiah invites them to be joyful because God is coming with them. God will comfort and take care of them in their journey. Isaiah describes God as a divine warrior who stretches God's arm not to kill the enemies, but "[to bend] down and scoop the little lambs into the divine bosom. If only lambs could purr."³ What a beautiful image of God!

Imagine yourself this lamb resting on God's arm and God tells you "do not be afraid, I am with you."

Isaiah chapter 40 is read in the second week of Advent that because the evangelist Mark uses Isaiah 40 to interpret the ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist. Mark identifies John the Baptist as the messenger who prepared the way for Jesus, and identifies Jesus as the one who comes with power and tenderness.

We are called to make spiritual preparation for the arrival of Jesus Christ? How to prepare your heart for the miraculous birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? How to renew your commitment to him? How to find comfort in your life when you face trouble and suffering? Can you imagine yourself resting in Jesus bosom to find comfort and peace?

² Motyer, J. Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (p. 300). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

³ Corrine Carvalho, "Commentary on Isaiah 40:1-11," *Working Preacher*, accessed December 9, 2017, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3491.

I found peace in these past few days through prayers and meditating on the word of God. I have my spiritual habits to remind myself of Jesus presence and comfort. For example, I learned from Luther's small catechism to make the sign of the cross when I pray my morning and evening prayer. I also make the sign of the cross every time I leave my home. According to Luther, the sign of the cross reminds us of our baptism and the presence of Jesus. What is your spiritual habit that helps you to feel the presence of God?

Being in a relationship with God and dwelling in God's word can help you to prepare your heart for the arrival of Jesus. The word of God helps you to renew your commitment to God's call on your life. We can prepare the way for the Lord Jesus by being in continuous renewing of our spiritual life. We can prepare our heart for Jesus by acknowledging our sins and asking God for forgiveness. We confessed our sins this morning at the beginning of the service. Confession involves repentance and also indicates you want God to transform your life, if not then your confession is in vain.

I strongly encourage you to develop spiritual practices that help you to prepare your heart and mind for Jesus' arrival.

Spiritual habit helps you to focus on Jesus daily as you learn to enjoy your relationship with him. Spiritual practices will help you to be in the continuous renewing of your relationship with Jesus, and you will always receive comfort when you need it.