

## Comfort my people

Isaiah 40:1-11

December 4, 2005

*"Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them!"*

*"All human beings are like grass;  
they last no longer than wild flowers.  
Grass withers and flowers fade  
when the Lord sends the wind blowing over them.  
People are no more enduring than grass."*

Well ... that's comforting!

Whether it's comforting or not, it's true. Our lives fade and wither and are gone, so quickly. Maybe it's because I'm on the other side of fifty. Maybe it's because we've buried five members of our church in the last six weeks. Maybe it's because I've been sick for much of those six weeks. Or maybe it's because my right knee has been giving me trouble and my left shoulder has been giving me trouble and my knuckles ache. For whatever reason, I've been doing quite a bit of thinking lately about my own mortality, about the short span of years I have left.

I'm not ready yet! I love being alive! I am grateful for every single day I have to be alive. That doesn't mean that every single day is a great day for me. I have my share of bad days, discouraging days, seemingly wasted days, days I am very glad to leave behind. But, as they say, being alive even on days like that is better than the alternative!

I love being alive ...

I love the feeling of a trout tugging at the end of my fly line ...

I love dipping the blade of my kayak paddle in the cold blue waters of the Atlantic, tasting the salt spray on my lips, and watching the ever moving line where the sea meets the rocky island shoreline ...

I love the burn in my thighs as I push my bicycle up the hill and make it to the top without downshifting ...

I love the dirt under my fingernails after I have scratched a hole in the garden soil to make a place for the lavender seedling ...

I love hearing that high note, that startling harmony, that glorious crescendo of choral praise that sends me into ecstasy ...

I love the beauty of language, when the words are just right and they open minds and hearts to a wholly new vision of reality ...

I love moments of discovery, when the elusive solution to the problem is suddenly just there ...

I love the feeling of accomplishment, when hard work pays off, when I have succeeded in making something good, something beautiful, something worthwhile ...

I love tender moments, moments of kindness given or kindness received, moments of recognition when we know we have understood each other, when we know we have shared something real ...

I love sharing life with my wife, I love making her smile, I love seeing her laugh ...

I love being alive! But I have been thinking, a lot, about my own mortality. From the very first breath we take, death begins to cast its shadow over our lives. Death's shadow moves onto us and into us, sometimes moving more slowly and sometimes moving more quickly, but always moving until it has entirely subdued us. And death casts that very same shadow over all the earth, overtaking and subduing the forces of light and energy that animate the universe. The earth is dying ... We are dying ...

So ... do you feel comforted now?

What can I tell you to comfort you? What can we do to find comfort and peace? The answer seems obvious, or at least the place to go to look for an answer seems obvious. If we are uncomfortable and distressed *where we are*, then to find comfort and peace we need to move to *somewhere else*. We need to get from here to there, literally or metaphorically. We need to undertake a journey, a spiritual journey.

And, indeed, so much of religious language and symbolism focusses on this idea of *journey*. We speak of *going to heaven*, of *following the path* to enlightenment, of *finding peace of mind*, of *achieving* spiritual maturity. We *go to church*, we *go forward* to answer the altar call, we *seek* spiritual direction, we *explore* new religious horizons. *I must go, I must move, I must change, I must grow ...* to find the comfort and peace I desire.

My dear friends, I need to tell you something. It is true that the heart of the gospel, the heart of the story of the people of God, the heart of the story of Advent *is* about a journey. But it is a journey *God takes*, not us! *God moves*, not us. We do not *go*, *God comes ...* bringing comfort and peace to us and to the places where we are already.

The good news is not about a God who welcomes us once we have completed our spiritual journey. The good news is about a God who comes to us -- sharing our common lot, conquering sin and death, making peace between us and among us and in us:

*Announce the good news!  
Speak out and do not be afraid.  
God is coming!*

God is coming. Take comfort, God is coming.

You, you who feel still the ache of a grief that will never leave you ...  
God is coming to you!

You who are frightened by a disease that has come upon you so suddenly and changed everything ...  
God is coming to you!

You who want to feel useful, who want to feel needed, who want to feel wanted ...  
God is coming to you!

You who are overwhelmed by the all the possibilities of a life stretched out ahead of you, wondering how to sort it all out, how even to begin to make all the decisions ...  
God is coming to you!

You who are distracted by so many things that seem so very important, living to work instead of working to live, finding it so easy to do and so hard to be ...  
God is coming to you!

You who are daunted by the possibilities and responsibilities of a new relationship, who want to do it right and do it well ...  
God is coming to you!

You who are lonely ...  
God is coming to you!

You who have lived long already, who feel death's dark shadow heavy upon you ...  
God is coming to you!

You who long for comfort, you who pray for peace, you who yearn for a taste of joy ...  
God is coming to you!

You who do think about your own mortality, who do love being alive, who do want to believe, want to believe in the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, want to believe in the promise of life to come ...  
God is coming to you!

*"Comfort my people," says our God. "Comfort them!"  
Tell them their God is coming!*

Your God is coming!