

PREPARE
THE WAY
OF THE LORD

3rd Week of Advent
DEVOTIONAL



ISAIAH 40:9-11

- ⁹ Go on up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
“Behold your God!”
- ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
- ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.

DAY 1

ISAIAH 40:9a

Go on up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
lift it up, fear not;

Previous verses have spoken of comfort to an exiled people, the end of warfare, the pardoning of iniquity, the revelation of the glory of God that will never fade but will last forever. Now the people of God are reminded that this good news (i.e. Gospel) is too good to keep to oneself! “Shout it from the mountaintops,” the prophet says. Lift up your voice with strength.

- Do you ever feel that the Gospel is too good to contain? What does your sharing of the Gospel look like?

Notice the encouragement of the prophet to the people, “lift up your voice with strength” and “fear not.” God knows that our efforts at heralding the good news often lack strength because we are afraid and he heads off our discouragement with encouragement.

- What fears lurk in your heart that may be muting a more robust, energetic, or joyful heralding of the Gospel?
- How can you clothe yourself in the call to “Fear not,” or its counterpart “Be strong and courageous” (cf. Josh. 1:9)?

PRAYER

Almighty God, we come today with our hearts cracked open to the good news of which you are reminding us. You ended our warfare, overwhelmingly pardoned our iniquity and have spoken a trustworthy word of comfort to us. Help us now to be as gracious in sharing this good news with others as you have been in sharing this good news with us. Help us to overcome fears of not knowing what to say or of seeming narrow-minded, outdated, and simple. Help us to take confidence in the life-changing power of this Gospel and may we herald it in all parts of our life! We pray all this in the strong name of Jesus. Amen..

DAY 2

ISAIAH 40:9b

say to the cities of Judah,
“Behold your God!”

The message of the redeemed is completely theocentric (God-Centered): “Behold, your God.” There is an important perspective that we are urged to gain. Take your eyes off from your circumstances, stop dwelling on the earthly goings on, Behold (Look, Focus On) your God.

- Do you find that you attend more to earthly goings on than to beholding your God? How might your perspective on life change if you were to Behold your God?

Notice that this word comes to Judah. The redeemed of God’s people are to say to the rest of God’s people, “Behold your God,” YOUR God. As a community we are to encourage one another to keep hold of a God who is willing to be called our own. There is an intimacy here that welcomes us to travel in its strength. We are invited to remember that God binds himself to us and we don’t have to earn his affection.

- Are you feeling that God is yours today? You belong to him. He has bound himself to you. How does resting in that truth change the way that you will navigate today?

PRAYER

O Lord, thank you for this reminder to behold you! We know in our minds that you are so far above the circumstances of our lives, that you are filled with strength, power, compassion and love for your people. We confess that we are repeat amnesiacs, forgetting YOU, the most important facet of our being. Thank you, Father, that you bind yourself to us. We know that we do not deserve this intimate state of belonging to you, nor could we ever earn it. May this truth be our fuel today, and throughout our lives. We pray this all in the sweet name of our Savior Jesus. Amen.

DAY 3

ISAIAH 40:10a

Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;

The arm of the Lord or God's right hand is a familiar idea throughout the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 62:8 "by his right hand and by his mighty arm," they are used in poetic repetition. They represent the power and might of God, God's ability to accomplish his purposes. Israel should be familiar with God's power because it was by the "Lord's hand" that they received judgment for their sins (40:2). However, now the good news of their salvation can be fulfilled because of the might of his arm.

Throughout Isaiah it is the arm of the Lord that will bring about salvation.

*The Lord has bared **his holy arm** before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Isaiah 52:10*

*The Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then **his own arm brought him salvation**, and his righteousness upheld him. Isaiah 59:15-16*

In Isaiah 53 the arm of the Lord is identified with the suffering servant.

*Who has believed what he has heard from us? **And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?** For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

While God will accomplish salvation by his might for Israel and all his people, that might comes in a different package than what we might be expecting. Previously Isaiah reminds us not to trust in man for they are a fading flower and withering grass and here he presents a might that is not made up of armies or chariots, but in one who is despised and rejected. It is not the might that the world expects but the power of the Christ that transforms the world through his servanthood. It is ultimately Jesus who is the right hand of God and the arm of the Lord, through whom the Father brings about our salvation.

PRAYER

Too often we seek the power and might that the world offers us. It has the appearance of being strength but only brings slavery. Help us to recognize that your might comes through servanthood. Open my eyes to where I can serve. Let me hear the cries of those in need. Praise God that the arm of the Lord is revealed in a lowly baby.

DAY 4

ISAIAH 40:10b

behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

What gives something value? Economics tells us that the price of a product is determined by the law of supply and demand. This is pretty straight forward with goods like milk, eggs, and masks. But what about the hand-knit blanket gifted to you at your baptism, the old faded letters from your significant other, or your mom's homemade Christmas cookies? Their price tag can't be determined by market value. These things are precious beyond their price tag because they mean something special to that person.

Today's nugget from Isaiah 40 gives us a picture of God reveling in His prized possession. Who/What is His reward? God's reward is us, the redeemed people for whom Jesus died! Our value in God's eyes far surpasses our net worth or the sum total of our good deeds. The Gospel is good news that brings real comfort because Christ truly accomplished salvation for sinners. (see Isaiah 62:10-12, Romans 5:6-8)

- Are you looking to Jesus today as your Savior? What does it mean to you that you belong to Jesus? How is the Holy Spirit nudging your heart to behold your God with eyes of faith?

*"because you are **precious** in my eyes, and **honored**, and I love you..."*

Isaiah 43:4 (emphasis added)

Jesus was born a babe in a dark corner of the world, was despised and rejected by men, and was crushed for iniquities not his own. The Father God ordained all that this Advent season celebrates out of His great love for you. Because of Jesus, you who trust in Him are God's reward. (See Isaiah 53:3-6, John 3:16)

- Are you feeling the loving gaze of God today? The Lord loves you. You are precious and honored in His eyes. How does resting in this truth affect this day before you?

PRAYER

O Lord, you abound in steadfast love. What a thought! That the Creator God of all would call me his reward, his prized possession. Thank you for my life for which Jesus came and died. Forgive me for the ways I am prone to so easily forget your love. Would your love move me to love those around me and point them to the comfort of the gospel. Help me to look towards that victorious day in heaven when I will indeed be with you as your reward. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAY 5

ISAIAH 40:11

He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.

What pictures come to mind when you read these words? What feelings are attached? Maybe you remember illustrations from Sunday School stories. Maybe this resurrects the tender, protective feelings you've had when you held a newborn baby or young child. Or you might think of the responsibility you've known caring for animals.

When Isaiah spoke these words, his listeners would remember a long history of shepherding. They would understand the hard work, the dangers, the skill and responsibility needed to be a good shepherd. And they would also know the love and care a shepherd has for each of his sheep. Abraham, Moses, David, great leaders in their history were shepherds, each picturing a part of the Good and Great Shepherd promised here. The strong Deliverer who brought salvation from enemies would be meek, gentle, personal. The arm that delivered was the arm that held the lambs and carried the most vulnerable. His power was most revealed in his tender love for sinners.

This is good news for people who have been captives, exiles! It is good news for all sinners living under a master who does not love them! This is good news to share!

Think about how Jesus lived out this prophecy while He lived on earth.

Think about the ways you have experienced the tender heart of Jesus.

Think about ways you can show/share Jesus' compassion to sinners in your family, neighborhood, workplace and beyond.

PRAYER

Tender Shepherd, We have heard your invitation to come, take your yoke and learn from your lowly, gentle ways. We are so weary from trying to fix everything ourselves. We long for the soul rest you give. We need your strong arm to carry us and to empower us to be bold in telling the good news we have to share this Christmas. We want your glory to shine through us, for Jesus' sake. Amen