

Comfort and Care Second Week of Advent Tuesday, December 10, 2013 8:15 AM
Is 40:1-11; Mt 18:12-14 (We are sent also to give comfort, even though many would think this completely unnecessary and superfluous. That is part of the burden that we carry as followers of Christ.)

Today we continue the reading of the prophet Isaiah. Now “the prophet Isaiah” is really not quite correct because **the Book of Isaiah** is so long, has so many chapters, that **it could not have been written by the same person.** Not only is it long, but it spans an enormous amount of time, so one person couldn’t have been alive over all this period of time. So it’s usually divided into three parts: chapter 1 through 39 is pre-exilic. It’s written before the time of the great Exile into Babylon where the people were deported and only a remnant was left in the land of Israel, then the second part: 40 to 55, which we read today, in fact, the very beginning. This is exilic; this is during the Exile. And then after: 56 and on to 66—that’s much later.

Now when we get into this particular section, we have **the part of the Old Testament Jesus quotes most often**, so that itself makes it very significant. It’s often called “**Second Isaiah**” to distinguish it from the pre-exilic part. Well, it is of course language that we associate very easily with Jesus. “**Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God.**” Again, this is addressed to people that have been deported. Just imagine what that was like. They were not held in slavery, but they weren’t at home either. And they weren’t free to return either until Babylon fell and Cyrus, the king of Persia, arose and said you can go back. So this is a prophecy of restoration. “**Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low.**” That may not seem very appealing if you take it literally. Who wants to see a beautiful landscape bulldozed? That’s not the idea however. What the idea is that a road is being made so that people can return to their land, to their home. So this is

really to be **taken figuratively to refer to a road is being constructed by the Lord to return the people.**

“In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!” Now the Greek says, “A voice crying out in the desert, make a way for the Lord. That’s often the way you find it. That’s the way it’s quoted in the New Testament. But the actual text says, “A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!” because here the people are in Iraq and **this is about a way through the desert to return to Israel**, the land of their heritage.

This voice continues to cry out and it says that **the Lord is going to care for his people the way a shepherd cares for ewe lambs.** Well, that’s a very tender concept, and now of course it’s one Jesus picked up when he talked about the **Good Shepherd**, taking the sheep and putting them on his shoulder—all these words of gentleness. So it is important that we recognize that Jesus didn’t come out of the blue as it were. **His ministry rested on a very solid tradition** that did not only start long before him, but it’s clear here as well that the people of God for years, for centuries, longed for rescue, longed for comfort, longed for salvation. Meanwhile, many people in Israel did not. In other words, it was not everyone that longed for this. Some longed for it. Some were very happy with the way things were. That explains why **when Jesus came only some people welcomed him. Others thought he was superfluous or a fraud.**

That same difference exists in our world today, and **we are sent also to give comfort, to care for others**, to address those very people that cry out in need: salvation, rescue, healing, whatever it is they need, **even though many would think this completely unnecessary and superfluous. That is part of the burden that we carry as followers of Christ.**