



St John Lutheran Church

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Isaiah the Prophet 40:1-11

Theme: The Mouth Of The Lord Has Spoken

Preaching in our day has become a loathsome word to many ... **perhaps** because people don't know what preaching's supposed to be. **For instance, I** found one definition of preaching in the American Heritage Dictionary that probably fits quite well the opinion many have of this task... **namely**, that preaching is the **"giving of moral advice, especially in a tiresome manner."** **But no matter** what kinds of negative impressions people might have about preaching... **the** fact is that many of the problems our Churches are experiencing today are due, in large part, to the fact that many who populate our pews no longer have any desire to listen to a preacher **"preaching."**

But the people in the pew are not entirely to blame. **Today many preachers** themselves would much prefer to take the path of least resistance in their preaching ... **which** means they aren't going to ruffle too many feathers ... **they're** going to make every attempt to maintain the **"status quo"** ... **they** aren't going speak specifically about the sins of the people... **and** they're never going do anything to upset the Church council... **or** the Synodical hierarchy.

We preachers, I'm sad to say, have been far too slow in taking up the itchy camel hair vestments of St. John the Baptizer. **We've failed in** our mission to be prophetic preachers. **We've fallen short** of our calling from God to speak His Word clearly and forcefully ... **and** that, I suspect, out of fear that we might make our people unhappy ... **or** move them too far away from their comfort zones. **But then, how** many modern, **"growth-minded"** congregations are likely to put up with a pastor who's not afraid to classify the **"religious"** among them as a brood of vipers ... **who'll** call even the most **"pious"** of them to task ... **and** who has courage enough to rebuke even the leadership for their sins ... **appealing** to them that they bear fruits of repentance? **I dare say** that if John the Baptist were called to preach in many of our Churches today, they'd soon send him packing ...**camel's hair**, leather belt, locusts, wild honey and all.

Yet in spite of the opposition from both sides of the fence, God's method of operation here in this world **remains the same** as it's always been ...

namely, He sends prophets, Apostles, evangelists and pastors to preach the Word. **He sends them** to bind up the saints through the work of the Ministry... **and** to build up the Church so She can grow into full maturity in Christ...**and** not be blown around by every tantalizing wind of doctrine that whispers **"sweet nothings"** in Her ear. **And this so** that when God's preachers have finished their preaching, the people of God will not only know that the mouth of the Lord has spoken... **but** also that in that Word they have received life and salvation... **for** man is to live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The problem we often have is that when God speaks, He sometimes **seems** to be talking out of both sides of His mouth... **which**, of course, gives us fits, because we like things tidy, orderly and logical. **We have trouble** when God speaks to us with **Law and Gospel**, with **wrath and mercy**, with **hell and heaven**, or about **damnation and salvation** ... **and all** of it in one breath, by the same Spirit, in the same Bible... **and** sometimes even in the same verse. **Yet, that indeed** is what we find here this morning, coming from the mouth of the Prophet Isaiah.

First we hear these words: **"Comfort, comfort My people,"** says your God. **"Speak tenderly and lovingly to the heart of My Bride. Preach kind words to Her. Comfort Her, but don't make Her comfortable. Tell her She's forgiven."** **With these words**, God is wooing His Bride back to Himself in the knowledge that Her time of hard service has come to an end... **that** Her exile's nearly over ... **that** the Day of the Lord will soon be arriving... **that** Her sin's been paid for ...**that** the Law no longer condemns Her ... **and** that She's received from the Lord's hand **double** for all Her sins... **because** Christ has died and received **double** the punishment those

sins deserve. **That's how it** is with the Gospel, you see... **there's** always more forgiveness there than we have sin to forgive... **which also** means that there's no life so wretched God could not redeem it.

When you confess in the general confession that you're sinful and unclean, what are you really confessing? **Think about it. Why, exactly, would** you say that about yourself? **You see, the problem** with a general confession is that it has a tendency to make us think we're "**generic**" sinners. **Generalities are safe**, aren't they? **We know that** when we say these words our sinfulness and uncleanness is being lumped together not only with everyone here in this Sanctuary, **but also** with the rest of our world's six billion or so people! **When you make** this confession, however, you need to consider what you may actually have done. **Are you a blasphemer** of God's name... **a despiser** of God's Word? **Are you disrespectful** of authority, a murderer, an adulterer, a cheat, or a liar? **Are you greedy** and envious of those who have what you don't have?

Well, the Law still says that each of us... **in** our own, perverse destructive way... **are indeed** guilty of all those things ...**whether** it be openly, secretly, or publicly... **by** word, deed, thought, or desire. **That's why the** Word of comfort God brings you through the spoken Word of forgiveness in the Absolution ought to be, for you, **a comforting flood** ... **because** it's being spoken to you as a double cure for all of your sins, all of your rebellion, and all of your turning away from God. **In Christ's Words** you are receiving double from the Lord's hand for all of your sins... **and** of this you can be sure, because the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Now in this text, the identity of the voice that speaks these words remains anonymous. **But whether it's** the voice of an angel, a prophet, a pastor, St. John or Judas... **it doesn't really matter a bit. The only thing** that matters is the Word of the Lord. **That's why the** Church covers Her pastors with vestments... **so** that from a distance, they'll all look alike. **The only time** it matters whether John, Elijah, Isaiah or Eric is speaking, **is** when you're playing personality games and following the person rather than the Lord.

When the Pharisees sent a delegation to investigate John, they asked him who he was ...**and** he replied simply, "**a voice!**" ... **nothing** more, just a voice. **Therein was John's** prophetic greatness. **Of himself he** knew he wasn't worthy to untie Jesus' sandals. **And indeed, anything** more than that comes not from God, but from men.

The point of the voice then, is that people will come to realize their need to prepare their hearts for the way for the Lord. **The terrain isn't** going to be the same after the bulldozers of God's Law have plowed their path. **Every low place** will be raised up, and every high place laid low. **Everyone must become completely** other than what they are. **If you're proud**, high and mighty... **you'll be** brought down. **If you've made** a mountain of self-righteousness out of your good works and Commandment-keeping... **the Law** will soon come to push that mountain over as if it were nothing. **If you think** you've repented sufficiently, that you're "**sorry enough**" for your sins, **that you've** tried "your best" to amend your life, **that you've** lowered yourself as low as you possibly can go, **the Law will** soon plow over your repentance and remind you **that you** haven't repented enough, **that you** aren't contrite enough, and **that no matter** how hard you think your trying, it'll never be hard enough.

But you needn't feel alone in all this... **for** the voice isn't "**picking on you**" alone. **This voice calls** out everyone... **for** there's no one who doesn't have a need to repent or change their mind concerning their relationship with God. **Whether religious, irreligious,** Pharisee, publican, good, bad, moral or immoral, we all have need of repentance ... **and** this, so that the road to our hearts might be paved and **prepared for the coming of Christ. Still, know this:** God is the One who's doing it ...**for** repentance is His work.. **Our only part** in this process is our confession that God's Law has had its leveling way with us... **because** the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The voice says, "Cry out." **The volume goes** up another notch.. "**What shall I cry?**" "**A Word of warning,**" it says - "**All men are like grass and all their glory like flowers of the field.**" **You and I,** we're mortal... **and** one day we all have to die. **The fruit of** our rebellion and the just wage for our sin is that from dust we have come, and to dust we shall return. **That's the payment** we receive for trying to be like God, instead of ... **being in Christ** ... **conforming** ourselves to His image. **Our works and** accomplishments are like he wild grasses and flowers of the field... **a momentary splash** of beauty and color soon spent... **something** that's here today, and gone tomorrow.

The great civilizations of Egypt, Medo-Persia, Babylon, Greece, Rome... **they're** all are faded and gone. **Their dusty remnants** and ruins remain only for archaeologists to study and tourists to pose in front of. **The great kings** have come and gone, and their kingdoms with them. **Their achievements** are largely forgotten... **except** by those who enjoy pouring over the dusty pages of history. **Even those revivals** and religious movements that once raced through the land like wildfire are no longer with us... **just** like many of their prophets, preachers, and followers. **There's nothing in** us that's going to last ...**not our** looks, **our** strength, **our** intelligence, or **our** achievements. **There's nothing in** us we can count on. **Only the Word** of our God stands forever ... **and** it's only that Word upon which we may be sure...**for** the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

And now that voice speaks again... **only** now it speaks with a shout: "**Get up to a high mountain, O Zion. Lift up your voice, O Jerusalem, and fear not! Say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God!'**" **This is Gospel. This is the** Good News about Jesus Christ. **And the reason** why it's to be shouted... **is because the Gospel ought to always overshadow and overpower the Law. When the voice** cries out, "**Behold Your God,**" it's shouting the Good News that "God is here!" **God's here in** the hearing of His Word. **He's here in** the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. **He's here in** the water of Baptism, and in His Word of Absolution... **and all so that** you might thus be prepared for the Day of His coming... **first** now, **as He raises** you from the death of your sin through His own life and merit... and then later on the Last Day, **when He** raises your body from the grave to be reunited with Your soul in heaven... **to** live with Him there forever and ever.

This is the Good News which the Church ought to be lifting up Her head and shouting to all the nations of the earth... **but** most especially to those who already belong to God by faith... and are part of His family: **Here is Your God in the Person** of the Babe of Bethlehem, **in the Man** of Calvary... **the** crucified, risen, and reigning King of kings and Lord of lords. **Your God is Jesus... God Incarnate... God** for you. **And here's where** He's to be found... **here**, where He's promised to be: **In Baptism, in His Word, and in His Supper... in His** very own Body and Blood, given and shed for you. **And this, dear** friends, is certain... **for** the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Through preaching and Baptizing, God, even now, is preparing His people for His coming. **That's how John** prepared Israel, and that's how God still prepares people in our day. **He comes in** Law and Gospel to Judge both the living and the dead. **To those who** refuse to believe He comes in power and might... **while** to those who have faith, **He comes** as a gentle Shepherd feeding His flock, **gathering** His lambs into His arms, **carrying** them in the fold of His garments, **and gently** leading those who are nursing their young to safe pasture. **For those who** trust in Him, there's nothing to fear... **for** His coming means salvation and life.

Dear Christian... God wants you to know **without** doubting that you are the people of His pasture... **the sheep** of His hand. You are the Baptized... **and** His Baptism is what marks you as one of His own. **You are His** sheep, and He is your Shepherd. **He's the One** who'll feed you, **gather** you, **pick** you up, and **carry** you in those arms once extended for you on the cross. **He's the One** who'll gently guide you... **through** both life and death... **to** the Resurrection of all flesh, and life with Him forever in His heaven. **You can trust** Him to do this for you **because you have** His Word on it ...**and because when Jesus speaks, the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Amen.**

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