**6th December Advent Two Reading Reflection and Prayers**

**THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: PEACE**

The second candle of Advent is the Candle of Peace. It is sometimes called the Bethlehem Candle to remind us of the place in which preparations were made to receive and cradle the Christ child. Peace is a gift that we must be prepared for. God gives us the gift of peace when we turn to him in faith.

The prophet Isaiah calls Christ "the Prince of Peace." Through John the Baptist and all the other prophets, God asks us to prepare our hearts so that he may come in. Our hope is in God, and in his son Jesus Christ. Our peace is found in him. We light this candle today to remind us that he brings peace to all who trust in him. *(Light Advent Candle Two - Purple)*

Let us pray - Loving God, we thank you for the peace you give us through Jesus. Help us prepare our hearts to receive Him. Bless our worship. Guide us in all that we say and do. We ask it in the name of the one born in Bethlehem, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**The Collect**

Almighty God, purify our hearts and minds, that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge and saviour we may be ready to receive him, who is our Lord and our God. Amen.

**First Reading Isaiah 40.1-11**

1Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.
3A voice cries out: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.’
6A voice says, ‘Cry out!’ And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’
All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. 7The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass.
8The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever. 9Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’10See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.
11He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark 1.1-8

Glory to you, O Lord.

1The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”’,
4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

**Reflection**

*“1Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. 2Speak tenderly to Jerusalem”* We are all in need of comfort at times. And we are all capable of giving comfort too. Comforting folk is something that sounds like an exceptionally good, kind thing to do. Comfortable!

When people need comfort, they are often saddened or scared, lonely or feeling unloved – or even unlovable! Needing comfort is part and parcel of being human. We all need to know we are not alone, that our pain is recognised and that we are worth being cared for and loved by others.

Comfort is such a good thing that a fabric softener named itself “Comfort” and sells the idea of their brand with lots of images of people cuddling fluffy pillows and snuggling into beds in the middle of the street!

But comfort did not always mean this; comfort meant to make someone do something that they were capable of doing but that they were too scared or too lazy to do, they needed to be comforted into action! That is not so comforting! This understanding of comfort is rather more challenging. Are we living the fullness of life that Jesus has given us, are we using all the skills that God has given us?

Both these passages have a theme of preparing the way, getting ready. As we get closer to Christmas, we are awash with lists and plans to make this year, with all its challenges and changes to normal, a special celebration at Christmas. Get ready – be prepared are the themes of this season, and we embrace them with gusto.

But what is being prepared and getting ready was not to celebrate one day even one as important as Christmas?

What if the “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”’ is a call to a whole life of following Jesus using the skills he gave us, using the freedom he won for us on the cross? What if making a straight path is about lining it with love and smoothing it with mutual care and support? What if the path is being made to allow the arrival of the Lord of Life? Are you making yours straight or is it full of bumps?

Advent is a time for us to pause and prepare our hearts to receive again the gift of the new born Christ, and to take our part in raising this baby Christ to the Messiah. It is so tempting to keep Jesus as the baby because we all know about babies, and can be comforted in caring for the baby – but that is not the comfort we know we should seek, instead the comforting of accepting the challenges of the adult Christ who can turn the tables, curse the fig tree, raise the dead, healing the sick and loving outrageously. And he says Follow me!

For if we are to be comforted, who better to challenge us other than the God of love?

**Prayers for Advent 2 by Brian Simpson**

Forgiving God, who cleanses and liberates us, give us the courage and insight to see ourselves as we really are, and to turn from our failures. May the whole Church be cleansed and renewed.

**Lord, in your mercy,** hear our prayer.

God of wisdom and truth, we pray for all world leaders and those with responsibility and authority that they may govern for the good of their people. We pray that they may avoid the corruption of power and be humble in all that they do. We pray for a new dawn of world co-operation and trust.

**Lord in your mercy** hear our prayer.

At this time of Advent, we pray that you will come into all our homes and renew us with your loving presence. Be with all those families for whom the prospect of Christmas is marred by anxiety. Help them to grasp the hope that is in the Christmas story. Stir us all into making an extra effort to alleviate the stress that others feel.

**Lord in your mercy** hear our prayer.

Transforming God, bring your reassurance and healing, hope and patience to all who are suffering in any way. Those who are in pain, despair, who feel lonely and afraid. Bring freedom to those in a prison of hatred or guilt. Transform all our hearts that we may be able to forgive and be healed.

**Lord in your mercy** hear our prayer.

We pray for all those who have completed their life on earth, that they may know the freedom and joy of your heaven. We praise you for all our many blessings, most of all for your coming to save us and set us free.

**Merciful Father** accept these prayers for the Sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**