

"Connected in Communion in Common"
December 6, 2020; 10:00 am
Isaiah 40:1-11
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

God's People Are Comforted

40 Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.

2 Speak 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.

3 A voice cries out:

"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

4 Every 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.

5 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

6 A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,
their constancy is like the flower of the field.

7 The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.

9 Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;^[a]
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,^[a]
lift it up, do not fear;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

10 See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.

11 He 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.

Sing: Comfort Ye!

2 Corinth. 1:20 All of God's promises have been fulfilled
in Christ with a resounding "Yes!"

COMFORT IN THE PROMISES

Comfort! Comfort ye, my people!

Says our God to us all. On this day. In so many ways.
As we move on through, on this journey of Advent, we
look to the promises of God—and take comfort in
those everlasting words and signs of God's presence
and Love. We are told—over and over—that we will
have Hope, Peace, Love and Joy—not just when we
"arrive at some future place and time," but *on the
journey*.

Through the seasons, through the steps of faith,
remembering that God has been with us before, is
now, and will be forevermore.

On this Second Sunday of Advent, we reflect on promises of God that we “know in our bones.” When you think of the Promises of God—what comes to mind?

Drop a note in the chat on YouTube—let’s make this interactive!

When I brainstorm a list, here’s what comes to mind: Emmanuel—God IS with us. Promise #1. Not just in Advent or at Christmas time. Always.

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

All is well. All shall be well.

“I have knit you together in your mother’s womb. I have numbered the hairs on your head.” You are never outside of the loving care of your Maker.

“Just Be Held”—“You’re not alone. The world’s not falling apart, it’s falling into place.” You are held in God’s loving arms.

Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so.

“I will not leave you orphaned. A Comforter, the Holy Spirit will come.”

“I was with your fathers and mothers. I led them out of slavery in Egypt, across a sea where they were not drowned, away from their oppressors. I led them into

the Wilderness, fed and nourished them there, and then led them into the Promised Land.”

“I will do the same with you,” says the Lord.

When the storms are raging around you, I will stay with you in the boat, hold you tight and calm the child, even when the storms continue all around.

The Lord neither slumbers nor sleeps. The Lord keeps our life—our waking and our sleeping; our going out and our coming in.

The Lord is my Shepherd.
I shall not want for anything.
He leads me along the path, and guides me.
He feeds me in the midst of raging enemies.
God surely surrounds me with goodness and mercy all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

DRAW NEAR --
Written by **Molly Baskette**

Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you. - James 4:8 (NRSV)

Social distancing is our new way of life. When people we don’t live with come closer than six feet these days, we might experience a frisson of fear. What a strange and alienating reality.

Humans are wired for connection and we do better—mentally and physically – with touch. Some sources say twelve hugs a day for optimal well-being. So what is a human to do when drawing near is both what we most need and, in an age of pandemic, what might end us?

The disciple James tells us that if we draw near to God, God will draw near to us. Is this a bribe? A threat? A tease? An invitation?

If we draw too near to God, will we be blown to bits? Or enfolded with love?

Will we be infected with something that will overwhelm our resistance, or healed of what ails us?

Pantheism believes that God lives in all things. If that is true, how can God be anywhere but here? Is God social-distancing from us too?

Quantum physics teaches that true contact is an illusion of nerve endings and brain signals. The electrons of every atom in the universe are, in reality, constantly repelling the electrons of every other atom. They reach for each other—but never quite touch. Perhaps the urge from James is an urge to this kind of proximity—safe space, close but never touching, sharing each other’s energy fields, distanced but deeply attracted in a felt way.

Imagine this attraction between us and God as:

the glance of first love across a crowded space;

the skin-sense of two people on a first date in a darkened movie theatre, whose hands are not quite touching;

the umbilical connection of mother and newborn in different rooms—sensing, smelling, hearing despite distance, the hunger growing, the breasts responding.

Prayer

God, you are already here, within us and growing, without us and protecting. Make yourself known anew, always near.

Promises—promises of presence. Of drawing near. Of knowing that whenever you do it to the least of these, you do it to and for me.

Whenever you are gathered in my name—there I will be, in your midst.

Whenever you break this bread and drink this Cup, there I am in your midst. Do this in remembrance of me.

Communion

As we celebrate the promise of continual communion, today, we pause to consider that it is different now. But not less. For Communion, is always about the spiritual presence of Christ—among us, between us, at the Table, in the pews, in the worldwide circle.

We are compelled to “go deeper,” think more profoundly about the spiritual presence, when the physical presence of one another is in a time of change. We’ve been doing this all along with Jesus! Experiencing his Presence in Communion, around the Lord’s Supper our whole lives. Now, we can experience that with one another—not bound by space and place.

In the challenge of this season is an opportunity.

For, we remember, that the bread and cup that we pass around and share is a powerful and tangible symbol—but it is still *only* a symbol—a Reminder.

A Reminder, a representation, something that points to the ultimate reality. What does it point to? God. Is. Present! Christ is Incarnate. Emmanuel! God WITH us.

God is with us—very much real. It doesn't depend on our actual, physical presence in the same room in a building. It doesn't depend on actual bread and juice from City Market or Lagrees. It never has.

Sure, it's easier to feel connected—to believe we are a community, a church, a vibrant congregation, but maybe that's a mask! Perhaps these times call us to take off *that* mask—the relational, imaginary mask that is a veneer—that actually keeps us far apart— keeps us living the illusion. One illusion is attendance vs. connection.

Let's take off the mask that says numbers are the #1 sign of vitality or “success.” Butts in the pews! That is no longer a measure of a spiritual community. Not even “views on the You Tube channel” is an adequate measure—for that does not measure the countless connections we have across the airwaves with the non-technical souls in our midst.

When we can't be in the pews in significant numbers, we are compelled, encouraged by Spirit, to go deeper. To look with new eyes. To look around us—not at whose body is actually IN the church building; not at “how many showed up” to an event, service, or

project.” How much money was put in the Offering Plate? Not “how many places got filled today at the Table? How many cups were needed in the trays? How much # did the Bazaar raise—this year compared to last year?

But....

How many souls were connected with? How many bodies of many different shapes, colors, life experiences, faith traditions were embraced? Brought into our open, loving arms, and the love and extravagant welcome of our loving God? Not even just those who wanted to come and be part of us and the way we do things! But those who come and change us and our ways because they bring new perspectives and diverse ways of doing things and seeing the world?

How wide is our circle? How many invitations are we sending out? Into the highways and bi-ways? Yes, the airwaves of the internet and the phone lines are today's highways and bi-ways that Jesus spoke of!

We are charged, compelled to go out and find ALL walks of life and invite all bodies to the feast! To the Wedding Banquet. To set an abundance of places, plates, chairs. To make room for every imaginable response.

That is Advent. God with us. Emmanuel. God—the Holy One—made flesh and dwelling among us. In ways, in scenes, in a spirit of connectedness we have not experienced before! Because we have had it easy. We have been able to gather in person and physical bodies, in geographic space to Be the Body of Christ.

Now we have been promoted to the Advanced Level! To Connection 2.0—on our way to 3.0!

Advanced Body-building of the Body of Christ. Without the trappings and illusions of the temporal, concrete plane.

Right now—wherever you are gathered—with your family or pets or in a community on a screen— send your spirit—your love, light, your energy and focus out from wherever you all sitting to 3 others in your world. They can be souls in our present congregation, souls in our Cloud of Witnesses, or loved ones in your family and friend bubble. Those that you most want to connect with, to share with in communion, in this moment.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great Cloud of Witnesses....” on both sides of the veil!

We are in a Thin Place. Right now. In this moment. 2nd Advent. Communion Sunday. Every time we gather is “Worldwide Communion!” Christ is here. Christ is there. Christ is among us—present in every connection

—every thought we have that brings another close. Whether on this side of the veil or in the Cloud. Every prayer and moment of mindfulness. Emmanuel. God With Us!

Let us commune—at the Biggest Table ever set. In the widest circle we can imagine and even wider than that!

How Great is our God! How great is our Gathering—in that expansive and extravagant and ever-growing love of God.

USE DURING COMMUNION

(Joy Harjo, 3-time Poet Laureate, first Native American Poet Laureate in the history of the position.)

Perhaps the World Ends Here

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.