

Who are we?

The question I would like to start with this second Advent Sunday is who are we?

I sometimes watch “Who do you think you are”, in which a famous person is looking at their family tree and trace back who their ancestors were and what they did. There is no doubt that who our ancestors were and what they did has a bearing on us physically, economically, emotionally and spiritually. And understanding our ancestors may give us a bit more insight in who we are and what we do.

But what that program also illustrates is the verses here in the middle of the Isaiah 40: 6b – 8, speaking about the human condition:

All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.

The human condition is frail in the sight of God. Some people in our family trees may have only lived a few days, others may have lived more than a 100 years, but in the sight of God we are all like grass and flowers. We last a season and then we are gone.

Looking at this and looking at our current year 2020, where we are dealing with the pandemic (shielding and isolating ourselves for the fear of becoming ill or making others ill) we can become quite depressed. But the reality of the pandemic brings home our vulnerability as human beings - it brings it into focus. It breaks through the illusion that we paint ourselves that we are strong, intelligent, mighty and good. It helps us as Christians to realise our need for God. And I hope it helps those who do not believe in Jesus to start to look for him.

The Jews who were in exile in Babylon also became very aware of this. Having lost their cities, homes, jobs and everything they find themselves at loose ends. They had to start again with nothing – everything had been taken from them and they find themselves in a totally new country, surrounded by a different culture, language and religions. They were strange people in a strange land.

They would have recognised that they were like grass. And after a while living in Babylon they recognised that they were there because their faithlessness to God, as

their exile was the punishment for not living in God's way and service, but following other gods or none.

So at the beginning of the 2nd part of Isaiah a voice of hope comes to them from the land of Israel and Jerusalem. And it seems like Isaiah had been taken up into heaven again (like he was at his first calling in Chapter 6) to witness heavenly beings in conversation.

Voices of comfort and love: Comfort, comfort my people ...speak tenderly" (v1-2), "he tends his flock like shepherd, gathers lambs in his arms and close to his heart, leading those with young gently.

Voices of forgiveness: "her hard service has been completed, her sin has been paid for, she has received double out of the Lord's hands".

Voices of promise and redemption in the wilderness: paths made straight, mountains and hills flattened, rough ground being made level and plain. It is as if God is making the way from Babylon back to Israel as straight and short as possible, with nothing in the way.

Urgent voices: Calling, Crying, Shouting and Saying. And we can hear rejoicing and celebration. From mountains, hills and valleys the message is "bring the Good News."

What is the Good News: "**Here is your God**" A simple message. To those who wither like grass and fall like

flowers. For people who God in all his power should ignore and forget.... But he does not. The Good News is: "**Here is your God**". He has come to you, he sees you and he loves you, despite your frailty and faithlessness: "**Here is your God**". This is the Advent message, this is what people need to hear that are in despair and desolation: **Here is your God**. Amen.

Comfort, Comfort now my people:

<https://youtu.be/eYTt6PWJfks>

“His peace has been spoken, His word is never broken,
The Kingdom of our God is now here.”

Beginning of the Gospel of Mark

Mark starts his Gospel with the Good News too. It is the summary of the whole Gospel. And he starts referring to Malachi 3:1:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

And Isaiah 40:3:

A voice of one calling:
“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD[[a](#)];
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.[[b](#)]

And the people who know their Bible suddenly realise what the core of the good news is: **God is here**. “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.” (v7)

John the Baptist prophesies (speaks the word of God) that Jesus Christ, who will come after him, is God (the Messiah). No wonder people come to him to confess their sins to him and to repent and be baptised. Be baptised by water, so they are clean, in order for them to be baptised again by Jesus: “I baptize you with[e] water, but he will baptize you with[f] the Holy Spirit.” (v8). They know that they cannot face God if they are unclean because of their sins. They know that they have to be washed clean to face the Holiest of Holiest: God.

John’s life was basic – he did not need anything, he had just a simple coat and lived of what the uncultivated land produced. He reliance was on God alone. His actions and his message were aligned with each other: He was authentic. And the people listened to him, even though his message was incredible. God is here? In the form of a human being?

God is here

Like John, we are also messengers. We who are the Church, the body of Christ, we are the ambassadors of Christ, of God, in our world. A world who is starting to realise that we are just grass and flowers... here today and gone tomorrow.

A world that needs to know the Good News of Jesus Christ: God is here. He became a little baby boy at Christmas, but grew up to be a man and God at the same time. This incredible man then did not change the world to his power, he changed the world through sacrificing himself of the cross. And Isaiah 40:2 was fulfilled:

that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

No completed because of their hard work or our hard work. But paid for, paid for by Jesus. They and we receiving double out of the hands of Jesus for all our sins. Not only are we forgiven, we are blessed.

This is what the world needs to know. This is the calling that extends from Isaiah via John the Baptist, Jesus himself and the apostles. These are the words of action that God gives us: Comfort, Speak, Call, Cry, Bring, Shout, Say: Here is your God.

Isaiah 40:9c: "Lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, **do not be afraid.**" Do not be afraid ... for the Lord our God is with us: Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem, God as human, crucified, raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, to come back to us all through the Holy Spirit.

Do not be afraid ... for the Lord our God is with us.
Amen