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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
February 2, 2014  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: 1 John 1:5-10; John 8:12-16

Hymns: 390; 371; 353; 52 (38:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and  
our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 51:1-12

“Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness,  
You who seek the Lord:

Look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug.

2 Look to Abraham your father,  
And to Sarah who bore you; For I called him alone,  
And blessed him and increased him.”

3 For the Lord will comfort Zion,  
He will comfort all her waste places;  
He will make her wilderness like Eden,  
And her desert like the garden of the Lord;  
Joy and gladness will be found in it,  
Thanksgiving and the voice of melody.

4 “Listen to Me, My people; And give ear to Me, O My  
nation:

For law will proceed from Me, And I will make My  
justice rest As a light of the peoples.

5 My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth,

And My arms will judge the peoples;  
The coastlands will wait upon Me,  
And on My arm they will trust.

6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
And look on the earth beneath.

For the heavens will vanish away like smoke,  
The earth will grow old like a garment,  
And those who dwell in it will die in like manner;  
But My salvation will be forever,  
And My righteousness will not be abolished.

7 “Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,  
You people in whose heart is My law:  
Do not fear the reproach of men,  
Nor be afraid of their insults.

8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,  
And the worm will eat them like wool;  
But My righteousness will be forever,  
And My salvation from generation to generation.”

9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord!  
Awake as in the ancient days, In the generations of old.  
Are You not the arm that cut Rahab apart,  
And wounded the serpent?

10 Are You not the One who dried up the sea,  
The waters of the great deep;  
That made the depths of the sea a road  
For the redeemed to cross over?

11 So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,  
And come to Zion with singing,  
With everlasting joy on their heads.  
They shall obtain joy and gladness;  
Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

12 “I, even I, am He who comforts you.  
Who are you that you should be afraid  
Of a man who will die,  
And of the son of a man who will be made like grass?”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Savior of all the world, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Comfort

Where does one turn for comfort? There are a variety of different answers for this question, and some are obviously better than others. Unfortunately too many people turn to alcohol or drugs for comfort. Even though it is commonly understood that such behavior doesn't resolve anything, indeed that it often makes things worse. Others turn to other substances that are perceived as being less destructive, such as the abuse of food, but that is not comfort.

Where should one turn comfort? Common wisdom again cries out that people should turn to other people to talk things through with others, to find out that others have experienced loss or pain or great psychological distress, and have survived! One might be reminded that there is so much for people to live for. One might be encouraged to reach out to others and find an enjoyable activity. Realize that things will get better with time. That's the weak comfort one gets from other people. It has some minimal benefit as long as one turns to people who care about the grieving or suffering individual. You wouldn't of course turn to those whom one sees as an enemy, would you?

And so why should we turn to God who deals with us in His righteousness? I am not righteous. Only God is righteous in all His ways. My flesh tells me that God is

getting even with me because of my sin. My flesh tells me that if I turn to God in His righteousness I may only find more distress and trouble. My flesh may even suggest to me that all the trouble in my life is already coming from God. And yet the Lord calls those who seek righteousness to come to Him for –

## **THEME: God Comforts His People with His Righteousness**

When things are bad in this world in this life when can surely turn to the Lord for comfort. We will find --

### **I. God's Assurance When All Seems Bleak.**

Our text begins with three important words, “**Listen to Me.**” We need to pay attention to what the Lord has to say to us. Those who had been listening to the words of the prophet Isaiah, and believing what the prophet had to say saw a very bleak future for Judah. Judgment was coming. Things were going to get very bad. Because of the impenitence of the people of Judah they were going to suffer at the hands of the Babylonians. There would be a captivity of seventy years when many of the people would be forced to live far away from their homeland. They were the fortunate, the blessed. In Judah there was to be great destruction, and death and desolation. What hope was there for Judah?

There was hope to be found in the Word of the Lord! He told them to remember where they came from. They were not always a great nation. So then those who follow after righteousness and seek the Lord, those who were believers, should remember that they came from Abraham and Sarah. Abraham was old and without children, and Sarah, who was also old, was barren. And yet the Lord had promised that a great nation would come

from Abraham and Sarah. And so it was. The Lord blessed Abraham, and he increased. **God is faithful!**

The same Lord promised that in Abraham' Seed all the people of the earth would be blessed. God is faithful, and He will bring forth righteousness in the earth, that is **His** righteousness, the righteousness of Christ that brings salvation. So the people of Isaiah's day were to remember this and be reassured that the Lord would cause prosperity to come His people, and the land would flourish once again.

In verse four the Lord repeats His encouragement for us to hear His Word and listen to Him. He tells us there that the law, or His express will for our salvation will proceed from Him. His righteousness is near. His salvation has gone forth! By faith we know how all this was fulfilled in Christ Jesus. We know that Jesus is our righteousness. When the Lord speaks of the coastlands that will wait for Him, He speaks of the salvation that was to go out into all the world. We also have seen the righteousness of the Lord. Even though the words of Isaiah were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born into the world, that are just as true, and just as comforting and reassuring today as ever.

Listen again to the verse 6 of our text:

**Isaiah 51:6** Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
And look on the earth beneath.  
For the heavens will vanish away like smoke,  
The earth will grow old like a garment,  
And those who dwell in it will die in like manner;  
But My salvation will be forever,

Everything that is going on in this world is temporary, that includes everything that we find distressing and

bleak. We read the newspapers and we read of sin and violence. We read of the continuing scourge of abortion in our country and hear how visible Christianity is being corrupted by false teaching. We may even wonder if there are any who will be saved! Some may look at how things are going in our own congregation, and think that things look pretty bleak. One might get discouraged in one's faith because of the tribulations of life that overtake us. In all these things the words of the Lord are right to the point, and they are just as reassuring for us as they were for the Jews who saw a bleak future ahead for themselves and their countrymen. The Lord says to those who seek Him and seek His righteousness, **My salvation is near. Look where you have come from.** The Lord also raised us up from bleak beginnings, and He shall continue to be with us and bless us on our way. We can take His Word for it, because His salvation is forever!

Jesus made this same point saying --

**Mark 13:31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

This is not only a comfort for us when things look bleak for growth and outward prosperity, we also possess –

## **II. God's Assurance When Oppressed by the World.**

**Isaiah 51:7-8** "Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, You people in whose heart is My law:  
Do not fear the reproach of men,  
Nor be afraid of their insults.

8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,  
And the worm will eat them like wool;  
But My righteousness will be forever,  
And My salvation from generation to generation."

The Lord repeats that call for us to pay attention. We know His righteousness in Christ. We trust the Lord, We believe in Him, so hear what He has to say, and understand that it is true, it is reassuring. In the world we will face opposition. The Lord Jesus told us to expect no less hatred than that which He faced, but that should not make us fear and tremble. We shouldn't be intimidated by the unbelieving world. They may hurt our bodies but that is all they can do, and in actual fact that is not very much, for the Lord has so much more in store for us than what we know now in this life. So Jesus also encouraged us –

**Matthew 10:28** And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

It is the world that faces corruption. It is the world that will be at the receiving end of the wrath of God. It is the world and all its evil that will be destroyed and shall surely pass away. The righteousness of God will persevere, it will be around forever. His salvation will continue to be among men from generation to generation. The Lord shall preserve His Church. He shall preserve us unto eternal life.

He encourages us to call upon Him, to call upon Him for His strength, to deliver us with the might of His arm, even as He delivered His people in days of old. Our text references how He made a dry path for the children of Israel through the Red Sea that they might escape the Egyptian army. It was the Egyptian army that perished that day. So the Lord protects us from the forces of evil yet today.

And even as His Word of deliverance for the people of Judah was fulfilled, and they returned once again to their homeland, and found joy and rejoicing in the Lord once more, so we also shall be brought home by the Lord.

We are the ransomed of the Lord. We were purchased, redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. God treasures us as His dear people. He will bring us to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, that we also might attain joy and gladness for endless ages. Sorrow and sighing will have no part in that life reserved for us in heaven.

As we leave here today we should go out encouraged and reassured. The Lord is with us and watching over us in all our ways. What is man? What can he do to stop the gracious good will of the Lord? God gives us His comfort and reassurance. Listen to the Lord and take the closing words of our text home with you, and know the power of God to save!

**Isaiah 51:12** “I, even I, am He who comforts you.  
Who are you that you should be afraid  
Of a man who will die,  
And of the son of a man who will be made like grass?

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.