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ADVENT 2B

10th December 2023

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening prayers

Light of the world,

This Advent season comes to us as an annual reminder that you are not a God of distance, of high-heavens and of power,

Rather, you are a God of presence, of earthly-ordinariness and of poverty.

If you have a candle, find it and something to light it. Put it somewhere you can see it. If you do not have a candle, use a lamp.

As you light the candle, or light the lamp, say these words:

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out.

Sit in silence and notice the light and the shadows in the room.

When you are ready, offer this time of worship to God:

Jesus, you are the light of the world, the light of my life, I offer this time to you in worship and prayer and praise.

Amen.

You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar.

Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11 – [Click for reading](#)

Responding to the reading

The simple, powerful first verse of Isaiah 40 ('Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God') expresses something of a message you might need to hear today. We know that the world needs to hear it, as we near the end of 2023. Ours is a world where war continues to rage in the Middle East, where the inequality and malnutrition of poverty continues for millions of families, where there is still homelessness across developed and developing countries, where we have higher numbers of slaves than ever in human history, and as we enter the season of Christmas, where rampant consumerism without regard for ethics is on display at every corner. Alongside that, perhaps many of us have a growing sense that we live in a spiritually bereft society.

Into that context, Isaiah 40 is a direct instruction, almost a command, a message calling for a response from the community of readers. In the repeated 'comfort' and the exasperated 'O', we can see something of the desperation in this cry – so much comforting is required.

Isaiah 40:1 does not instruct us to 'sort the world out' or 'fix everything yourself'. Rather, the prophet cries 'comfort, O comfort my people'. We are called to give support and love, not find overnight cures for a wounded world.

Comforting can be found in a peaceful moment shared, in a hand of solidarity offered, in painting an image of hope. The powerful closing verses of Isaiah 40 demonstrate exactly the kind of hope that a Christian community can offer a fallen world. 'Those who wait for the Lord' (Is 40:31) find a renewal of strength, a faith in a power beyond any of the forces of

oppression on this planet. This is the authority behind the prophet's instruction to 'comfort my people', this is the power of 'your God'.

David Foster Wallace, a brilliant American writer and thinker, recognised that as human beings we 'have other options' to those most obviously provided by this world. He famously said: 'it is within your power to experience a crowded, loud, slow, consumer-type situation as not only meaningful but sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the stars.' As Christians, we believe in a God who created the universe, but also continues to move within that creation. Therefore, as we experience the every-day (even the every-day of long queues for the tills and overcrowded commuter trains), we also experience the eternal, the heavenly.

That is the experience John the Baptist points to by 'preparing a way' for Jesus. Not providing a solution or fixing the problem himself, but making a way for the saviour, pointing towards 'the one more powerful than I'. John is a radical, a challenger, but also a messenger of comfort – bringing news of transformation to a world that needed to change. Can we do the same?

We are called (Isaiah 40:3) to 'in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord', to open up a passage to healing through the redeeming power of an omnipotent God. This is not a project we engage in critically, or piously, but 'tenderly' (Is 40:2), showing people the comfort of love. We believe that the sufferings of this world are not the limit of our experience because there is a utopian equality promised in verse 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'.

Some questions for you to ponder this week. If you know someone else who uses these Vine at Home resources, or might like to, why not find a time to discuss the questions with them?

- Is there someone you could comfort this week?
- Do you have a comforting message to bring to family and friends during this Christmas season?
- How will you point people to the possibility of change, in the way that John the Baptist does?
- How will you create a space for the Christ to come, into the wilderness?

Advent God,

Take my offering, my life and the things I have in my care at the moment, and put them – put me to use for your kingdom-building here on earth, that peace and goodwill to all people may become a reality.

In Jesus' name I pray,

Amen.

Hymn:

255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Go out and meet a God who is already out there,

Step forward and find a Christ who is already at work in your community,

Be bold and discover a Spirit who is willing to take risks.

As you prepare, may the Christ-child make himself known to you in the extraordinary ordinariness of each day.

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week Ahead

Monday 11th December

- Holy God, this day I offer my prayers for all working in healthcare, here in this country and around the world.
In the midst of difficult conversation, important decision and often long-hours, bring your peace, your sense of clarity, and your strength,
Amen.

Tuesday 12th December

- God is everywhere
In this space and all spaces
In this time and all times.
- God is waiting to meet you and is ready to welcome you
Just as it has been for all eternity, so be still, and notice.

Wednesday 13th December

- Today is the feast day of St Lucy, which many traditions combine as a festival of light (perhaps because Lucy comes from the same root word as the Latin word for light: lux).
- In the darkness of these mid-winter days, you may wish to give thanks for the light and pray for those affected by feelings of darkness.
- Come, Lord of light, and hold back the rising dark. Amen.

Thursday 14th December

- When you are getting dressed today, think of each item of clothing as a gift. Think about where it has come from (where you bought it, or who gave it to you), and previous owners (or people who have borrowed it), who made it (and whether or not they got a fair wage for their work), where the cotton was grown or the sheep for the wool reared (or other equivalents for other materials).
- As you are intentional about getting dressed, recognise how connected you are to the world around you and pray about how this connection makes you feel. Lean into any discomforting questions or uncertainty it raises in you.

Friday 15th December

- God of the Advent season,
Help me to prepare a space in my heart for your coming again this Christmas time.
Help me to make a place of safety and sanctuary where others can come to rest their weary heads and share something of themselves.
Show me something of your Christmas welcome, Lord God. Amen.

Saturday 16th December

- In some cultures, today marks the beginning of a nine-day celebration (ending on Christmas Eve) marking the trials that Mary and Joseph endured while trying to find a place for Jesus to be born, called Las Posadas (literally 'the inns' or lodgings').
- Today you might like to pray for all who are making a journey: refugees or migrants on a literal journey of miles, and all who are on a journey of self-discovery or discipleship. If that's you, pray for yourself and for clarity about what your next step on the journey might look like.