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ADVENT 2B

6th December 2026

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

Spirit of the living, loving, invisible God,
draw me close to you this day, I pray.
Draw me close to your love, to your peace, to your light,
By the invitation of the God-with-us, Immanuel.

[Pause]

In this season of Advent,
As I prepare to worship you, O God,
I let go of all the burdens that are weighing me down,
And lay them at the feet of your cross, O Christ.

Loving God, may I face this day renewed and refreshed,
may I let go the concerns of yesterday,
and notice your Spirit here in this space with me, as I worship.

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

Often during these responses to the readings, we focus on the gospel for the day, but today we are in the Old Testament, and the first few verses of Isaiah 40. Not only is this one of the most iconic passages in the Hebrew Bible, it is also one full of wisdom of which we can make use today.

Old Testament prophecy is often a message of doom and gloom, declaring 'to Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin' (Micah 3:8). Isaiah chapter 1 describes 'offspring who do evil', sounding not unlike modern prophets of doom as they exclaim a 'broken Britain' and even paint a picture of an entire generation that no longer feels integrated into society or welcomed in our communities.

Whilst prophecy of the terrible consequences of our actions no doubt has its place, the simple, powerful first verse of Isaiah 40 ('Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God') expresses something different, something altogether more positive. It 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 – the writer of Isaiah 40 clearly recognised that there was a great need for comfort at the time of writing.

Today, we know what it is to live in a world that needs comforting. Ours is a world of climate grief, of the inequality and malnutrition of poverty, of homelessness across developed and developing countries, of higher numbers of slaves than ever in human history, of consumerism without regard for ethics and of a growing sense that we live in a spiritually bereft society.

The issues on this (far from exhaustive) list look very daunting, but Isaiah 40:1 does not instruct us to ‘sort the world out’, it 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’ (Isaiah 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, the 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.

Part of the role of the Christian comforter to a broken world is to do just this: to show people that they ‘have other options’. 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’ (Isaiah 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’.

In a darkening world, Isaiah 40 offers an alternative, a different narrative that speaks into twenty-first century Britain as it did into exiled Israel at least 2600 years ago. Amongst the inequality of this world, there is a God who is beyond oppression, beyond worldly forces of any kind, and this God will make ‘Himself’ known to us at the end of all things. We believe in a time when ‘the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together’ (Isaiah 40:5).

Our challenge, as people seeking to follow the Christ this advent season, is to convey the empowering comfort that this message brings into a world that does not know or feel it.

Questions for Reflection

- Isaiah begins with the words, "Comfort, O comfort my people." Where do you see a need for comfort in your community, and how might we as a church offer it in practical ways?
- Preparing the way means more than waiting. What obstacles might we need to remove, personally or as a church, to make our community more welcoming, just and compassionate?
- When change is slow and hope is difficult to sustain, what helps you keep going? Where might God be inviting you to take one small step towards a better future?

Hymn / Song
255 STF – The kingdom of God is justice and joy – YouTube

Blessing

May you go from this place and time, uplifted and inspired to follow the invitation of your Spirit, the invitation to get involved with your restoring, healing, comforting mission, the invitation to share the love you have received with all around you, this day and throughout this week.

May you go, by the grace of God, by the power of the Spirit, and serve the Christ in peace.

Amen.

Prayers and Prayer Pointers For This Week

Monday 7th December

- On this day in 1703, the greatest windstorm ever recorded in the south of Great Britain made landfall, with estimated deaths around 9,000 and top wind speeds of 120mph.
- Today we live in a world of increasing freak climate events and disasters. You might like to focus your prayers on all who are impacted by those at the moment, or who are living in fear of the next crisis. You might also like to pray for all working on developing early warning systems and flood defences to help save lives in the event of disaster.

Tuesday 8th December

- Today is honoured in some traditions as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, or a day when we give thanks for the miracle at the start of the gospel stories. As Wesley puts it: ‘our God contracted to a span / incomprehensibly made man’.
- In the midst of our Christmas preparations, today you might like to take a moment to focus on the figure of Mary in the nativity story, and to give thanks for mothers everywhere, praying for maternal health, for safe homes, for kindness within families, for all who find their relationship with their mother difficult.

Wednesday 9th December

- God of the coming kingdom,
  As I continue my Advent journey, help me to be people of patient hope.
  When the road seems long, keep me faithful.
  When the world seems dark, help me to shine with kindness.
  When I feel powerless, remind me that small acts of love still matter.
- And when I celebrate the birth of Jesus, may I remember all that his coming asks of me: to welcome the stranger, comfort the sorrowful, seek justice, make peace, and love my neighbours as myself. Amen.

Thursday 10th December

- The Episcopal Church in the USA marks today as a feast day for Karl Barth, the theologian and church thinker who wrote a great deal of wise and helpful reflections on church life, including his famous ‘Church Dogmatics.’
- An oft-quoted sentence attributed to Karl Barth is the invitation for Christians to have ‘a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other’. Today, you might like to get a copy of a newspaper and use it as a guide for prayer. As you read, what challenges you? What inspires you? Where are the areas of the news agenda that are crying out for prayer?

Friday 11th December

- Today, you might like to take a moment to notice a light or set of lights that have gone up near you recently, perhaps even in your own house?
- As you look at the festive decorations, why not give thanks for the light of the world, and invite that light to shine into your own life this Advent season?

Saturday 12th December

- God of justice and peace,
  We pray for a world in which so many people long for a straight path through difficult terrain.
  We remember those living amid war and violence, those displaced from their homes, those seeking refuge, and those whose lives are shaped by poverty, oppression or discrimination. Amen.