

Sermon followed by Service

December 17, 2023

Isaiah 40:6-8

Let me Grinch for just a minute. What's going to happen to Christmas 2023? When Christmas is over, you'll say goodbye to your visiting family and friends and they will be gone. A week or two later, our Christmas food will be eaten and gone. In two, maybe three weeks, your Christmas tree, if it's real, will be shedding dead, dry needles, and then it will be gone. It won't be long and our Christmas money will be spent and gone. Our Christmas clothes - most of them will soon be packed away or returned. Our Christmas toys - how long before they're broken or forgotten? What will become of Christmas 2023? For most of us, within three days of Christmas, or three weeks, three months, or three years, Christmas 2023 will be gone and forgotten.

What a grouchy, mean-spirited, Grinchy thing to say. Perhaps, but we need to hear that. Christmas gifts do get used up and Christmas trees don't last forever, even if they're artificial. If we set our holiday hearts and hopes on Christmas trees and Christmas gifts and guests, we're setting ourselves up for disappointment. Maybe our Christmas guests won't make it and we'll be alone and disappointed. Maybe we won't get the gift we're hoping for, and we'll be disappointed. Maybe the gifts we give won't be appreciated, and we'll be disappointed. If we set our holiday hearts and hopes in the wrong places, we will be disappointed.

Isaiah knew that. Isaiah knew a thing or two about people putting their hope in the wrong places. So does God. So today God points us to where we can find, not a passing Christmas hope, not a passing Christmas glory. but a Christmas hope and glory that lasts forever.

This season of Advent we are looking at one of the great chapters of the Bible, Isaiah 40. Two weeks ago we heard the good news of God's advent love, "**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.**" Last week we heard God's advent encouragement, "**Prepare the way for the LORD; God is coming to save his people.**" This week we hear the voice of God, but it almost sounds like the voice of a Grinch. Listen to what God has to say in the first part of our lesson: "**All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.**"

During Christmas we like to think of green Christmas trees and red poinsettias. But God gives us a picture of brown, withered grass and bare, empty flowers. If you've seen pictures of Judea, you may have seen brown desert hills that would make our Lake County look like the Garden of Eden. But Judea didn't always everywhere look like a brown desert. Every spring and fall there would be hills and valleys green with grass and white and yellow with flowers. Until. To the east of Judea there is a desert. And every May and November, an east wind would blow off that scorching desert. Over night, in just a few hours, a field of green grass would be turned into brown withered stubble and bright flowers would be turned into bare stems.

That brown, withered grass; those bare, empty stems; that's us and our glory. **“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them.”** In the Garden of Eden, the breath of God gave life. But here in our lesson, the breath of God blows hot and takes life.

When our lesson talks about the withered and the blown, God is not just talking about the low-lives, the garbage, the failures of this world. But the glories of this world, the successes of this world, the best that this world has to offer - in and with its sin, this world withers and falls before the holy breath of the Lord. The godless glories of this world will all be torched; the sin-tainted glories of this world will all be blown away. So much of what we set our hearts and hopes on in this world will be torched and blown away. Not just the grinchy, scroogy ugly, but even the world's "Christmas-cute." So if we set our holiday hearts and hopes on Christmas trees and Christmas gifts and Christmas what-not, what can we expect? Before the holy breath of God, they will be blown away.

That doesn't sound very cheerful, does it? But Advent is a time of waiting. And our God doesn't want us to be disappointed when the waiting is over. When we set our hearts and hopes on the people of this world, we're setting our hearts and hopes on withered grass, and we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. When we set our hearts and hopes on the glory of some success in this life, we are setting our hearts and hopes

on what could soon be bare stems and fallen flowers - again setting ourselves up for disappointment.

God doesn't want us to be disappointed while we wait. And he doesn't want us to be disappointed when the wait is over. So he tells us where we can set our hearts and our hopes so we aren't disappointed: **"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."** Remember the lasting glory of this Advent and Christmas season. The word of our God stand forever.

What is that word of God? In this world of sin and death, God's word says, "I am coming to save you." In this world withered and burnt by the holy breath of God, the loving word of God whispers, **"Comfort, comfort my people."** In this world of pain and suffering, God points us to Jesus and he promises; this is what we'll hear next week: **"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young."**

The word of our God that stands forever is the plan and promise of our God to save his people. God's people in Judah would be taken hostage by King Nebuchadnezzar, but God made a plan and gave his promise to save his people. We also were held hostage, held hostage by sin, death, the power of the devil. But God made a plan and gave a promise to save us. And he didn't just plan a good plan; he didn't just talk a good talk. He worked his plan; he kept his promise. God sent his Son Jesus into the world as the son of Mary, as God's man to take our place. As God's man to take our place, Jesus was put under

God's demands for perfect obedience. As God's man to take our place, Jesus was tempted and attacked by sin and Satan. As God's man to take our place, Jesus faced the fires of God's judgment. And through it all, Jesus stood. Jesus stood true to God. Even as God was making him pay for our sin, Jesus stood true to God.

And now, through faith in God's promise, Jesus' standing is given to us. When we are called in to the courtroom of our God, we won't stand before the judge as withered grass, our lives looking like bare, empty stems. No, with Jesus, we will stand before God with the Word of Jesus. His word and his blood will cover our sin. His word and his life will cover our life. His word will have us standing true and right with God. Not just for a passing moment - the word of our God will stand forever - and so will you with God.

Singing Jingle Bells can get old. Christmas gifts can be forgotten. Family and friends can let us down. Success can be blown away by failure. But the Advent promise of Jesus, that Jesus will come to save his people - that's something we can set our hearts and our hopes, and we will not be disappointed. Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... Christmas isn't even here yet, and we are already getting tired of it. Tired of the same songs over and over, the same commercials over and over, the same fighting, begging, complaining ... over and over.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we are reminded of something better than holiday celebrations that can get old. We are reminded of a holy day Truth that will last forever!

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

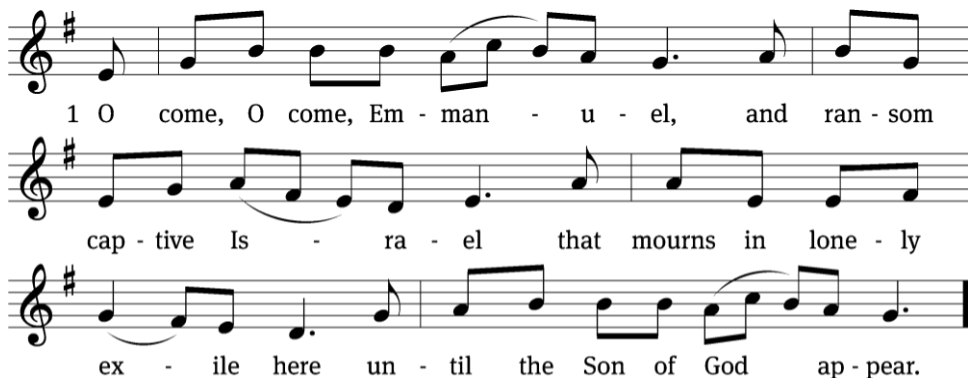
C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION OF SINS AND LIGHTING RITE

M: When God created the world, he made the crown of his creation - the human race - in his image (Genesis 1:26). Perfect people lived in a perfect world in a perfect relationship with God.

C: **But mankind rebelled against God, bringing sin into the world and death to all. God declared the wages of sin to be death (Romans 6:23). We too are guilty, and we confess our sinful thoughts, words, and actions.**

M: However, God - who is Love - did not want to be separated from his children forever. He promised a Savior who would bear the punishment for sin, defeat the devil, and break the bonds of death.



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som
cap - tive Is - ra - el that mourns in lone - ly
ex - ile here un - til the Son of God ap - pear.

Refrain

Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el
shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

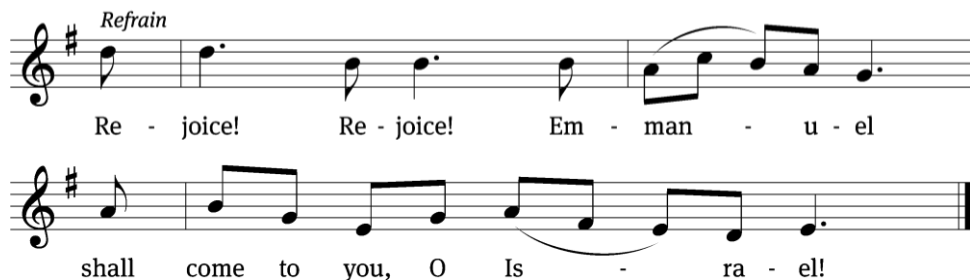
M: When the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Jesus, our Savior, has paid the ransom for your debt; your sins are forgiven (Galatians 4:4,5). In view of God's mercy, today we light the joy candle. Though we have not seen Jesus, we love him; even though we do not see him now, we believe in him (1 Peter 1:8).

C: **And we are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for we are receiving the end result of our faith, the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:8,9).**

O, come, our Joy, whose love for-gives— Whose death as-sures that
we will live! Move us to heed the call, "Re - pent!"
And trust, for your sake, God re - lents. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
Em-man - u - el Shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

M: In the joy of God we go to the world - to our friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. We regard no one from a worldly point of view. If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 16-18).

C: God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Jesus, who had no sin, became sin for us; in him we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).



PRAYER OF THE DAY

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus Christ, and come with the good news of your mighty deliverance. Drive the darkness from our hearts, and fill us with your light; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 40:1-8

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
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.

A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"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 Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 73B

Refrain

Sure - ly, it is God who saves me, I will trust in him and
not be a - fraid, for the LORD is my strong - hold and my
sure de - fense, and he will be my Sav - ior.

Tone



I am always / with you;
you hold me by my / right hand.
You guide me with your / counsel,
and afterward you will take me into / glory.
Whom have I in / heav'n but you?
And earth has nothing I desire be- / sides you.
My flesh and my / heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for- / ever.
Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain

SECOND READING

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matthew 11:10

Alleluia. I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

John 1:6–8,19–28

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

Now this was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Messiah."

They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.' "

Now the Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?"

"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

"When All the World Was Cursed"

Hymn 317

When all the world was cursed by Moses' condemnation,
Saint John the Baptist came with words of consolation.
With true forerunner's zeal the greater one he named,
and him, as yet unknown, as Savior he proclaimed.

Before Saint John was born, he leaped in joyful meeting,
confessing him as Lord whose mother he was greeting.
By Jordan's rolling stream, a new Elijah bold,
he testified of him whom prophets had foretold.

Behold the Lamb of God, who bears the world's transgression,
whose sacrifice removes the devil's dread oppression.
Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin,
who for our peace and joy will full atonement win.

O grant, dear Lord of love, that we receive, rejoicing,
the word proclaimed by John, our true repentance voicing,
that gladly we may walk upon our Savior's way
until we live with him in his eternal day.

SERMON

Isaiah 40:6-8

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Eternal Lord, give us peace as we ponder the good news that you forgive our sins in Christ. Lead us to see clearly the path you have laid out for us.
Work in us so that we believe and live the Word we have heard today.

Provide courage and compassion to all who preach and teach your Word. Fill them with a love like yours as they proclaim your grace to us and all people.

Move us to love all ministers of the Word wherever they serve.

Guard and guide the families of our congregation. Lead husbands and wives to love each other with commitment, respect, and patience. Help parents to grasp the eternal value of keeping their children close to Jesus all their lives. Grant joy to those who are single, and make them a blessing to others.

Protect us from the temptations that surround us; give us pure hearts and minds.

Provide wisdom and insight to those who make laws and set policies. Give us respect for those who protect us from crime. Lead us to value the rights of our fellow citizens and to defend those who cannot defend themselves.

Bless our land with peace and prosperity so that the gospel may be proclaimed to all.

Give us passion to share the story of your love with our family and friends. Overcome unbelief, and open the hearts of people everywhere to believe the good news that Jesus has forgiven their sins and opened the gates of heaven.

Fill us with joy over every sinner who repents and comes to trust in you.

Extend your healing power to those who are sick and suffering in body or mind. [Pour out your special blessing on . . . *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Give patience and compassion to all who care for the sick and dying.

Lift the eyes of the distressed to your love in Christ.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Gracious God, you govern and direct all things and you love all people. Hear our prayers, spoken and silent, and answer them in your wisdom and grace.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

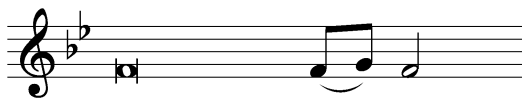
LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)



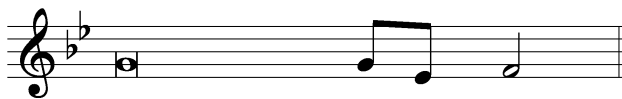
The Lord be with you.



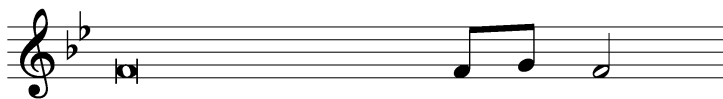
And al - so with you.



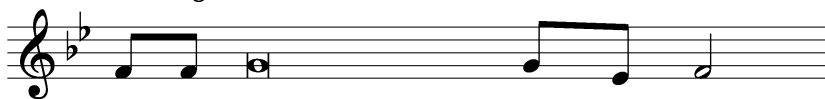
Lift up your hearts.



We lift them up to the Lord.



Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.



It is right to give him thanks and praise.

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared when he called people to repentance and pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SUNG)

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD (SUNG)

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.
Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

“Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord”

Hymn 315

Let the earth now praise the Lord, who has truly kept his word
and at last to us did send Christ, the sinner’s help and friend.

What the fathers most desired, what the prophets’ heart inspired,
what they longed for many’ — a year stands fulfilled in glory here.

Abram’s promised great reward, Zion’s helper, Jacob’s Lord —
him of twofold race behold — truly came, as long foretold.

Savior, hear my welcome cry — loud hosannas lifted high!
King of glory, enter in; cleanse my soul of ev’ry sin.

Crush for me the serpent’s head that, set free from doubt and dread,
I may cling to you in faith, safely kept through life and death,

And, when you shall come again as a glorious king to reign,
I with joy may see your face, freely ransomed by your grace.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith, nourished our hope, and strengthened our love. By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Lift Up Your Heads, You Mighty Gates"

Hymn 305 vs. 1, 4, 5

Lift up your heads, you mighty gates! Behold, the King of glory waits.

The King of kings is drawing near; the Savior of the world is here.

Life and salvation he will bring; therefore rejoice and gladly sing.

To God the Father raise your joyful songs of praise.

Fling wide the gates; prepare your heart to be a temple set apart

from earthly use for heav'n's employ,

adorned with prayer and love and joy.

So shall your Sov'reign enter in and new and nobler life begin.

To God alone be praise for word and deed and grace!

Redeemer, come! I open wide my heart to you; here, Lord, abide!
O enter with your saving grace; show me your kind and friendly face.
Your Holy Spirit guide us on until our glorious goal is won.
Eternal praise and fame we offer to your name.

OFFERING

*If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code
with your mobile device.*



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Join Us in Worship This Holiday Season!

Advent Wednesdays

December 20

3:30 and 6:30 pm

Advent Dinners at 4:30 pm

Sunday, December 17 - **Children's Christmas Service** at 3 pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 4 and 7 pm

Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am

New Year's Eve Service/Lord's Supper - 5 pm

Join us for our annual Game Night after the service!

Pre-Christmas / Winter Project List

Please feel free to recruit some help and take on a project - on your schedule or on ours!
If you have questions, we have some contact names below, or ask Pastor.

Air Quality - Replace Classroom Air Filters - Contact Pastor or Amy

Outside Projects - Contact Todd Haefke

- Wash Church/School Entry Steps
- Move School Banner frame to paved lot shed (banner stored in _____)
- Move Table/Benches to Paved Lot Shed

Fixings

- Rip Out Old Cabinet - Contact Sarah
- Install New Classroom Shades - Contact Sarah
- Install New Classroom Numbers - Contact Pastor
- Office Folding Machine - will a vacuum cleaner belt save \$1000?
- Mortar (inside) around new church basement windows
- Weatherstripping - west entry
- Cable Management Covers/Casing - throughout school building
- Door Stop - Men's Fellowship Hall Restroom

Ladder Work - Contact Pastor

- Lights - Fellowship hall, lower hall, women's restroom
- Number Our Windows - Safety # Decals for Classroom Windows
- Church/School Entry lights (scaffolding needed)
- Lights (ballast replacement?) - fellowship hall and bottom of church entry steps

Muscle Moving

- GaGa Pit Base - Contact Jonas Penaloza

Painting - Contact Pastor or Sheryl

Paint (Touch Up)

- White - Church School Entry - under steps and landing
- Railings - west entry upper
- West Entry Wall - lower south and AC pipes
- Classroom Blue - take a tour
- Touch-up paint by display window in 7&8 room
- School entrance railing touch-up paint
- School entrance brick touch-up paint
- Lower hallway tablet holder (remove?)