

**Second Sunday of Advent -B 2020-2021**  
**Isa. 40.1-5,9-11///2Peter3.8-14///Mark 1.1-8**

→ *“Comfort...comfort my people...says your God....speak tenderly to Jerusalem...and tell her that her hard service is over...”*

→those are the opening words take from our first reading today from the prophet Isaiah....spoken twenty-five hundred years ago to announce a new beginning coming to a people who desperately needed another chance....

→their cities had been ravaged....their homeland occupied....and they had been taken off into captivity....PAUSE

→those words...spoken long ago can easily be translated in terms of today...

→because in a similar sense.....our lives have been ravaged...our homes have become our world....and in some respects we are being held captive by the unknown, by our fear, and by our uncertainty...

→we have all had rough starts...unpredictable patches of turbulence that upsets our carefully laid plans...throws chaos into our order...and creates havoc with our sense of normalcy....

--[well] today, on this Second Sunday of Advent...we also hear about a rough beginning...our gospel reading is taken from the beginning of Mark's account...

→and unlike...our other accounts from Matthew and Luke....Mark's version doesn't begin with the story of Christmas

→there is no angelic annunciation, or a stable in Bethlehem...and no shepherds or kings

→instead Mark begins his story with a scruffy preacher named John the Baptist...heralding the coming of the Messiah.....admonishing his listeners to change their ways....to alter their lives....and transform their behavior.

→a rough beginning...with some rough words....*PAUSE*

→but then again throughout the Bible there are countless stories about bumpy beginnings

→the Book of Genesis starts us on our journey...when we hear... “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

→our first reading today from the prophet Isaiah captures the opening lines of a sermon whose theme is new beginnings... “*comfort, give comfort to my people says your God.*”

→and finally we have Mark...presenting us with a rough looking and stormy sounding preacher....

→so what does this mean for us today?

→no doubt all of us at some time or another...have had rough times in life....

→...memories of some rough beginnings

→even now we are experiencing some rough times as we continue to cope....and as we strive to mingle together a sense of normalcy along with all that we are facing

→feeling a bit out of sorts...as we try to celebrate Christmas...under unusual and confining circumstances

→[and yet] this season of Advent...and our readings, and in particular our Gospel message... today invites us to once again ask ourselves and to remember...*what is really important to us and to look at our priorities in life*

*PAUSE*

---our readings today speak of our need to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord...and what we might be doing that as we deal with all the changes we have had to make over the past months

→in a nutshell...the message for us today is that if we have had a rough beginning...if we have strayed away from what matters

→...then we are being invited this Advent season...in this time before Christmas to smooth out this rough beginning and make straight once again our paths...echoing our Advent theme this year... “now is the time”

→ “now is the time” to make something of our lives...to rely on the hope, optimism, strength and resilience of who we are...and what our faith means to us...

→there is encouraging news each day that this will all come to an end sooner than later if we do our part and prepare...prepare ourselves and prepare for the coming of the Lord.

*PAUSE*

→in NYC at the new World Trade Center memorial...you can walk around the memorial fountains and look at all the names of those who lost their lives engraved in marble...

→likewise at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C....and you can do the same....and walk down a long path and look at the names etched in stone

---and as you stare at the long column of names and read them you have no way of knowing whether the person whose name you are reading was rich or poor, black, white or brown, Christian, Jew or atheist, young or old, handsome or ugly

→[and] it really doesn't make any difference because all that **really** matters is what each person made of their lives and the time they had...

*PAUSE*

→so what should **we do**... if we find that our lives are out of sorts....

→... if we are lacking in comfort and confidence

→... if we are feeling as if we are not prepared for the coming of Christ?

→the answer is, of course, that we should do exactly what the prophet Isaiah proclaims and John the Baptist preaches

→*take comfort...and make straight our paths*

→that is what Advent is really all about

---it is a time for us to take inventory of our lives and make whatever changes in them that need to be made

---a time to reassess where we have been, and more importantly where we are going....

---and a time to discover the importance of having Christ as the center of our lives.

→because you see....if that were to happen...in each of us....

→ then this season of Advent might truly help to turn these rough times

.... into a smooth finish.