



St Margaret's Church

Together we aim to:
Worship God, Proclaim Jesus,
Grow in the Spirit

In Contact

21st February 2021

Isaiah 40: 1-31

Comfort & Strength



Softness is a thing called... We all probably know that the missing word here is comfort. Many theologians believe that there are over 150 missing years from the end of Isaiah 39 to the start of Isaiah 40. And what is the first word spoken by God after this gap? "Comfort."

Since the time of Hezekiah, despite a brief resurgence of faith under King Josiah, Judah had been led away from God and then the Babylonian forces arrived to plunder Jerusalem and the temple in 596BC, taking many Jews back to Babylon. They returned to totally destroy the city and temple 10 years later. At this point, more Jews, especially the wealthy and healthy, were taken into exile to Babylon. It was to this remnant of Judah some 25 years later that God speaks: "Comfort my people".

Just as in Isaiah 6, we are taken back to the throne room of God at the start of Isaiah 40. In both passages God is speaking to his angels and holy creatures. In Isaiah 6, when Isaiah is commissioned as a prophet, it is a message of judgement but here He is telling them to bring comfort - comfort to the despairing exiles who feel God has abandoned them (40.27).

There is softness in these words of comfort. Jerusalem needs to know the punishment is over; that she has been forgiven (2), that God is making a highway for her safe, easy and speedy return (3) and that He will be their shepherd caring for the weakest and most vulnerable (11). This indeed is good news (9- which is the first time "gospel" is used in the Old Testament.)

There is also awesomeness in these words of comfort. God is stronger than Babylon and their gods (their worthless idols: 18-20). He is mighty in power (10,26). He is the creator of the ends of the earth (28) who rules the stars (12 &26) and the waters and all the nations. He is beyond compare (18). He is beyond being counselled or taught (13-14). He is the everlasting God (28 - cf Isaiah 9. 6). The one whose word stands for ever (8) and is the one who comforts Israel.

In the Bayeux tapestry, there is a scene of the English king standing behind his troops with a spear in his hand prodding them towards the amassed French forces. The caption below reads: "King Harold comforts his troops".

God knows where each of us are emotionally, spiritually and mentally, and what type of comfort we need. To those in despair, weary or faint, who wait upon Him, He offers a renewing of strength (29-31). To others, His comfort comes as a reminder of how awesome our God is. And yet to others the comfort they need may be a prodding in the right direction!



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Bible Verse for 2021:

I am about to do something new; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.

Isaiah 43: 19



Daily Hope is a free phone line which offers music, prayers and reflections as well as full worship services from the Church of England at the end of a telephone line.

Praying for the streets of Burnage:

We are looking to develop ways to contact the streets we pray for and to ask 'what can we do for you?' and get any specific prayer requests. Get involved and speak to Matt or Jane Franklin.

Looking Ahead :

Sunday 28th February: We will continue with our Sermon Series in Isaiah as Peter Miller preaches on 'Restoration Promised' from Isaiah 43: 1-21

During Lent:

TAKE IT UP: As a church we want to get all our members thinking more about mission and outreach so that we become more mission minded and, when we can start doing gathered events again, we will be mission ready. So find a book on mission to read during Lent and use the "#liveLent" booklets daily.

GIVE IT UP: If you have given up something for Lent, chances are that you will be saving money. It has been suggested that at the end of Lent, we gather these "savings" and split them between St. Ann's Hospice and Francis House both of which have connections with our church members and both of which would have lost some revenue streams during the pandemic.

February 21st to 27th **Please Pray for:**

- ◆ People living in Paignton Avenue & Devon Avenue.
- ◆ Celebration Team on Wednesday planning services on 7th & 28th March & the future.
- ◆ Matt's supervision of Duke this week or next.
- ◆ All church groups assessing their work and opportunities for the future.
- ◆ APCM reports being written with thoughts for the future.
- ◆ Dignity Team Member Margaret & her children after death of her husband, Gervas.
- ◆ Barnabus reopening the 'Beacon' after several staff had COVID.

Television & Radio this week:

BBC 1 - 11.00am: Sunday Worship. The Rev Kate Bottley introduces the first in a series of services for the season of Lent.

Songs of Praise 13.15pm: Katherine Jenkins visits L'Abri fellowship in Hampshire to explore Christian faith and hospitality. With music from Laura Wright and the Choir of Royal Holloway.

BBC Radio 4 - 8.10am: Marking the first Sunday in Lent, with Father Dermot Preston of St Aloysius' RC Church in Glasgow, and spirituality guide, Mary O'Duffin.

Readings: John 12, Matthew 4: 1-11

BBC Radio Manchester (95.1FM) 8am to 8.30am: Mike Shaft presents religious stories and the day's news on this local radio programme.

Sunday evening at 8 o'clock:

At home pray for our church family and join them in breaking of bread.



Help is available if you need it: **Call 0800 234 6123**

Monday to Friday: 9am to 5pm & Saturday: 10am to 2pm