

Isaiah 40:1-11ⁱⁱ

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall 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 grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, Here is your God!" See, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

ⁱⁱ About Isaiah 40:1-11

This reading serves as a prologue to chapters 40-66, sometimes called "the book of the consolation of Israel" because of this opening passage. It serves both as an account of a new calling and as a statement of the major themes of the rest of the book.

The voice announces that the salvation of exiled Israel is imminent, the nation's "penalty" (v. 2), that is, its time of compulsory servitude in exile, is over. Now the people are invited to

receive both deliverance and restoration.

Unlike other instances of the highway image in Isaiah, where the people journey on a path prepared by God, this highway is prepared for God's travel. Verses 3-4 reflect the practice of sending messengers ahead of visiting royalty. The prophet shows that the comfort due to God's people is inextricably linked to God's presence and the revelation of glory. Joy, fearlessness and comfort result from the supreme "good news": "Here is your God!" (v. 9). As sovereign ruler and tender shepherd, God comforts the people.