

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God... (Isaiah 40:1)*

Our culture is obsessed with comfort. From our clothing choices, to heating and cooling, to modern conveniences, just about everything is meant to make us comfortable. The same might be true in churches as well, where people are invited to “come as they are.” On the surface, it seems like a great idea to invite people to “come as they are.” Generally speaking, though, the invitation isn’t usually about clothing choices or anything else on the surface. It carries with it the assumption that it doesn’t matter how they’re living their lives. Come to hear the Word of God, but no matter if that Word doesn’t have an effect on who you are, what you believe, and how you live. Come, one and all, sinners and righteous, sick and healthy, but stay as you are. In our world, even some churches want people to come and increase their worship attendance, all the while living their own way, with their own beliefs, amid the culture of this age. What it comes down to, in the end, is comfort – not comfort in how I look, but comfort in how I live. Comfort in not having expectations. Comfort even in how we view God. We might imagine Jesus in the manger as a cute and cuddly baby who slept 8 hours each night for Mary and Joseph and never caused a fuss. We like the safe, cuddly, magical Jesus best. In the end, it’s about being comfortable.

But the story of Jesus is anything but comfortable. When we gather at Christmas, we remember a baby born to a woman who was surrounded by accusations of adultery, since the baby wasn’t Joseph’s. We remember a baby born to a woman who had to travel an arduous road to Bethlehem when she was almost full term. We hear about a baby born in an animal stall full of nasty smells of cattle and donkeys, because there was no room for them in the house. We remember a family who had to flee Bethlehem for Egypt because of the murderous hatred of a king named Herod. We come to worship a man who’s first words to his people were “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Jesus didn’t come as anyone expected. Jesus came just as he was. He is the Word made flesh, the incarnate God.

If we’re truly to know the story of Jesus, there’s no way we can simply be ‘comfortable’. If you want to find Jesus, you have to receive him as *he* comes. For the shepherds, it meant traveling to an animal stall. For the Magi from the East, it meant going not a palace fit for a king, but to the backwater town of Bethlehem. For the disciples, it meant not ushering in a new kingdom of Israel, but watching as Jesus brought the reign of God among the poor, the sick, and the sinners. For all people, it means not looking for his favor on a throne, but on a bloody and splintered cross. Even now, it means not searching the depths of your feelings of your own wants and desires, but receiving a crucified and risen King. It means standing before this God with nothing to offer but shame and guilt, for we are but poor sinners in need of a Savior.

But this Jesus came to us just as he is, not to punish, but to save. He was born that day in Bethlehem to the cries of the angels, “Peace on earth and goodwill toward men!” He walked the earth forgiving and healing, restoring and raising. He died for our sins and was raised for our justification. He didn’t come to grant our every wish, but to save us from our own sinful desires. And believe me, it’s an uncomfortable process. It’s a dirty, bloody, “you’re going to die” kind of process. Jesus must first kill our sinful desires, our self-centeredness, our expectations that everything in this world is going to turn out just the way we want and expect it. He re-centers us on his cross, on his death, on the desires of God for all people.

Brothers and sisters, Christ invites you to come as you are. But believe me when I tell you that you won’t stay that way. God comes as he is – in a lowly infant, on a cross, and out of an empty tomb – and brings you to himself and into that uncomfortable but glorious story. The only true comfort is knowing that you are dead to sin and alive in Christ, who was born for you, who died for you, who was raised to new life for you, and who will come again in glory to make you just as he is.

-Pastor Squire

“Comfort, comfort ye My people, speak ye peace,” thus saith our God; “Comfort those who sit in darkness, mourning 'neath their sorrows' load. Speak ye to Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them; tell her that her sins I cover and her warfare now is over.”

(“Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People,” *LSB 347*, v. 1)