

## Welcome and notices

### Call to worship

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God’ (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

### Opening song: 10,000 reasons

[https://youtu.be/DXDGE\\_IRI0E](https://youtu.be/DXDGE_IRI0E)

**Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His Holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your Holy name**

**The sun comes up  
It's a new day dawning  
It's time to sing Your song again  
Whatever may pass  
And whatever lies before me  
Let me be singing  
When the evening comes**

**Bless the Lord O my soul...**

**You're rich in love  
And You're slow to anger  
Your name is great  
And Your heart is kind  
For all Your goodness  
I will keep on singing  
Ten thousand reasons  
For my heart to find**

**Bless the Lord O my soul...**

**And on that day  
When my strength is failing  
The end draws near**

**And my time has come  
Still my soul will  
Sing Your praise unending  
Ten thousand years  
And then forevermore**

**Bless the Lord O my soul, O my soul  
Worship His Holy name  
Sing like never before, O my soul  
I'll worship Your Holy name  
I'll worship Your Holy name  
I'll worship Your Holy name**

### Opening prayer & confession

O Lord our God, Shepherd of our souls, we praise and bless your holy name. Grant us the grace to desire you with our whole heart, so that desiring you, we may seek and find you, and so finding you, we may love you, and so loving you, may hate those sins which separate us from you, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you  
and done evil in your sight. We turn away  
in sorrow. In your mercy forgive us and  
cleanse us. Renew a right spirit within us  
and restore to us to joy of your salvation;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### Assurance of pardon

The good news is that Christ has died and has taken away your sin, even yours. Now walk in the freedom his forgiveness brings, for his glory's sake. Amen.

### Offertory prayer

Lord, we offer ourselves and all we have to you, for the sake of your kingdom. Now bless these gifts and our lives that we may rejoice in your goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. <sup>5</sup> And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

<sup>9</sup> You who bring good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and he rules with a mighty arm. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. <sup>11</sup> 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

### Reflection: THE REPAIR SHOP (1)

#### Comfort, comfort my people

Our series for the summer is taken from Isaiah 40-55, and we're calling this series 'THE REPAIR SHOP.' You know the programme where people bring in damaged items, often old but all with a story to tell, and the experts set about fixing the item and restoring it. Five hundred years before Christ an even more significant repair was taking place, the restoration of God's people, where tears of sorrow turned to tears of joy.

God's people had suffered in indignity of being taken captive to Babylon. Their capital, Jerusalem, and the temple and all it meant had been destroyed in 587BC. Towards the end of the Babylonian exile a new prophet appeared, with a series of messages for the restoration of God's people. This prophet doesn't have a name, but his messages are collected together in 16 chapters of the book of Isaiah (whom theologians call second Isaiah). These are messages that have changed the world. In a time still of so much uncertainty about covid, so much uncertainty about what the future will look like, these messages in Isaiah are there to give us strength and hope.

The prophet begins with words which sum up God's call to the exiles and his call to the church in this and every generation. "Comfort, comfort my people," says your God.' These words are a summons to gentleness, strength and hope. There is a radical change of tone from the earlier prophets of the exile, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. These two earlier prophets see

the problem of Judah's sin and said that exile would happen, yet hope would come. But here a line is drawn under all that suffering. The emphasis is on forgiveness and understanding. There is a warmth to the prophet's words.

'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.' The word 'comfort' is used in the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, for words offered to grieving and broken people. Comfort is also often used of God, describing his change of mind and heart out of compassion for the needy. John's gospel uses the name 'the Comforter' when referring to the Holy Spirit, the one who draws alongside, who strengthens us, who helps us to stand (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians also echoes this passage, reminding us how much comfort is at the heart of the nature of God and his gospel, and therefore is at the heart of our calling as Christians. 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God' (2 Corinthians 5:3-4).

Mark begins his gospel with the words of John the Baptist who echoes the cry of Isaiah, 'The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"' (Mark 1:3).

When the people of God first heard this message through Isaiah, they would have been encouraged that their time of exile was coming to an end. That the glory of the LORD would be revealed would have reminded them of the presence of the LORD in the temple – God with them. But the glory is revealed in the desert. He

offers us his presence where we are. He doesn't wait until we have everything in our lives sorted out. No, God comes to meet us to comfort us.

Yes, the exile was coming to a close, but a greater comfort was coming than a return home. The one they had longed for – the Messiah – was coming, and the herald was to call everyone to prepare for his coming. This Messiah would be the good shepherd who carries his people close to his heart, and still does.

What does all this mean as we listen today to Isaiah's words as followers of Jesus the Messiah, as people who have received the Holy Spirit, as those who have received comfort from the Lord and who are part of a community of comfort? Just as this first message was part of the repair process for the exiles in confusing and challenging times, so it is for us. Our calling remains to be a people who come to the desert to meet with God. And there we learn to speak tenderly, just as God has spoken tenderly to us, to draw alongside others, just as God has done with us. The comfort will sometimes be practical as we continue to offer support. Yet the comfort may well be a smile, an encouraging word, a phone call or even a brief note. 'Comfort my people,' says your God.

God promises a new beginning, and he gives a meeting point, not in Jerusalem or in the temple but in the desert. The desert was a very familiar place for the people of God, an important place in their history, in their story. The desert for us speaks of our insecurities, our vulnerabilities. It is a place that speaks of all the difficulty in our lives. Yet the desert becomes somehow the meeting place between God and his people. It is there in the desert

that God wants to do something new, a place where he will reveal his glory.

We listen again to the gospel and prepare the way for the Lord for others through actions, prayers, words and worship. This message speaks of comfort, healing and forgiveness, and is a message that prepares people's hearts for the coming of the Lord in the middle of the desert of difficulty. Many need hope, comfort, tenderness. But rather than looking inward at the difficulties and struggles we face and wondering about all that could be better in our lives, maybe we should rather ask, 'What is the desert of my life that God wants to use to create this future of hope and comfort?'

Let's pray.

### **Song for reflection: The Father's Song**

<https://youtu.be/efEc84ZuzQk>

**I have heard so many songs,  
listened to a thousand tongues,  
but there is one  
that sounds above them all.  
The Father's song, the Father's love,  
You sung it over me and for eternity  
it's written on my heart.**

**Heaven's perfect melody,  
the Creator's symphony,  
You are singing over me  
the Father's song.  
Heaven's perfect mystery,  
The King of love has sent for me.  
And now you're singing over me  
The Father's song.**

### **Prayers of intercession**

Gracious God, you bring hope when hope seems lost, you breathe new life in places of grief and devastation. We pray for the people of Afghanistan as they suffer civil war yet again, and the people of southern Europe as they suffer extreme heat.

Comfort all who have lost family and friends, homes and livelihoods, those who've lost trust and hope.

Lord of all mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Gracious God, for all governments around the world we pray they will uphold values of justice, mercy and love. During this pandemic, give them wisdom and courage to serve the people. We also pray for those who make major decisions about the climate emergency, governments, scientists as well as all people through our actions. Give wisdom and courage to all.

Lord of all mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Gracious God, we pray for all who have received exam results at this time. We pray for young people having to make difficult decisions about their future - for those deciding about sixth form courses, and for those students making decisions on higher education or apprenticeships.

Lord of all mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for our community of Bowthorpe and our city of Norwich. Grant us a vision to see what can be achieved when we share the gospel and our lives with others. Increase our sense of purpose, that we may be aware of where and how you want us to serve you. Help us to walk in the light of your presence and to answer your daily call to follow you and bring the comfort of the gospel to others.

Lord of all mercy

**Hear our prayer**

Lord, we pray for all those known to us in need. We pray for Roger and Carol Hales, Roger and Sheila Hinton, and Robert Young. Give them strength in difficult times. We also give thanks for Mike and Margaret's granddaughter, Shelby, with the safe arrival of her baby Alvie, and pray that the medics would be able to know the right course of action with Alvie's heart murmur.

Lord of all mercy  
**Hear our prayer**

All these things we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory  
are yours, now and for ever. Amen.**

**Closing song: He will hold me fast**  
<https://youtu.be/30OphlgGkiM>

**When I fear my faith will fail,  
Christ will hold me fast;  
When the tempter would prevail,  
He will hold me fast.  
I could never keep my hold  
through life's fearful path;  
For my love is often cold;  
He must hold me fast.**

**He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold  
me fast.**

**Those He saves are His delight,  
Christ will hold me fast;  
Precious in his holy sight,  
He will hold me fast.  
He'll not let my soul be lost;  
His promises shall last;  
Bought by Him at such a cost,  
He will hold me fast.**

**He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold  
me fast.**

**For my life He bled and died,  
Christ will hold me fast;  
Justice has been satisfied;  
He will hold me fast.  
Raised with Him to endless life,  
He will hold me fast  
'Till our faith is turned to sight,  
When He comes at last!**

**He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;  
For my Saviour loves me so, He will hold  
me fast.**

### **Closing prayer and blessing**

Lord, keep us in your grace that we may desire you more and more and be examples of hope and comfort to all we meet; for your glory's sake. Amen.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and all whom you love, now and for ever. Amen

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

