

**ADVENT 2020—SEARCHING FOR A SAVIOR**  
**God is Faithful**  
**Isaiah 40:1-11 and Mark 1:1-8**  
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People are fickle. Can I get an “amen” on that? If you didn’t say “amen,” maybe you don’t know what fickle means. Here are some definitions...

fickle    adj.   'fi-kəl: *Likely to change your opinion or feelings suddenly and without a good reason”; Changing frequently, especially in regards to one’s loyalties, interests or affection; Bouncing from one spot to another on a whim; Lack of steadfastness, constancy or stability.*

People are fickle....other people, that is. Before we get all smug and think about how stable we are compared to others we know, I have some bad news for you... fickleness is part of human nature. You’re fickle and so am I.

Due to our fickleness and the instability of life, we’re always looking for something or someone we can count on. I’ll never forget my senior pastor, Ken Hepner, who I served in ministry with for 10 years, telling me early in my ministry that I shouldn’t place him or anyone else on a pedestal, because people will always let you down. When he told me that it kind of sobered me and made me sad, but it was true, and it stuck with me so much that I passed the same advice along to a man I’d gotten close to who was in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. We were talking one day and he was telling me how much he admired me and how much I meant to him in his spiritual journey. I shared the same insight with him that Pastor Ken had shared with me years earlier. *“Don’t put me or anyone else on a pedestal. People, including me, will always let you down.”* In a world that’s unsteady, shakable and uncertain, we’re all longing for stability—something solid we can hold on to.

Our need for stability is especially evident as we look back on 2020. Think about the things we thought we could count on, that were suddenly up in the air... Who could have imagined in February that our church wouldn’t meet face to face for 4 months and that in December we’d still have less than half of our church family in attendance on any given Sunday morning? Who could anticipate that most of us would be forced to work remotely from home and that after 8 months, some of us still haven’t returned to our workplace and some

businesses have already said their employees won't return until next summer? Who could have envisioned we'd be under a "stay at home order" for several months or that the final 2 & ½ months of last school year, students would be fully remote and some schools haven't met face to face since then? If we've ever longed for stability, we long for it now, and yet, much in our world is uncertain.

It's in this state of uncertainty and instability that we enter Advent 2020—the start of the new church year. We traditionally celebrate the start of the New Year on January 1<sup>st</sup> with parties and countdowns and apples, strawberries, pickles and wrenches dropping from the sky at midnight, but the traditional church year begins with Advent—looking back to Jesus' coming as a Baby and reflecting upon the past year; looking forward to Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming for his church and considering what the year ahead may hold for us; and, we begin the new year in Advent by searching for a savior and desperately crying out, "Come now, Lord Jesus!"

Last week I asked us to focus on 2 personal questions: "***Where in your life are you most in need of God's deliverance today?***" and "***What do you desperately need a Savior to do for you?***" While our specific answers to those questions will differ, I'm confident every answer highlights the need for stability, assurance and certainty. Amidst the fickleness surrounding us, we cry out for God's faithfulness and our Advent texts today speak to the faithfulness of God. Follow along as I read Isaiah chapter 40 verses 1-11...

Isaiah 40:1–11

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 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.

A voice of one calling: "In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

And the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all people will 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 like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

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!” 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.

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.

And Psalm 85 continues with the theme of God’s faithfulness...

Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13

You, LORD, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.

I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly.

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.

The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.

Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

God is faithful!

Last week’s sermon was titled, “Welcome to the end times!” We tend to think of the end times with fear and trepidation and we associate it with prophecies and dates for Jesus’ return, but the Scripture is clear that Jesus’ birth and ministry inaugurated the end times—when God began a new thing. And while the New Testament is clear that no one except God the Father—not even the angels or Jesus—knows the day or hour when Jesus will return, our job as his followers is to be ready and waiting. Our Advent texts today emphasize again the importance of our readiness and they do so in the context of God’s faithfulness. Listen to these

words from 2 Peter chapter 3, words the Apostle Peter wrote to explain to 1<sup>st</sup> Century followers of Jesus why Jesus hadn't yet returned...

#### 2 Peter 3:8–15a

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.

Peter explains that it's God patience and his desire for all people to experience his saving grace that has kept Him from returning yet. This passage also encourages us with the truth that Jesus' Spirit empowers fickle people like us to live holy, godly lives as we look forward to Jesus' return.

Today's lectionary reading from the Gospel of Mark chapter 1 repeats some of the words of Isaiah chapter 40 and connects them with the person and ministry of John the Baptist—the forerunner to Jesus.

#### Mark 1:1–8

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"—"a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

The Old and New Testaments emphasize the faithfulness of God, and nowhere is God's faithfulness more clearly seen than in his sending of Jesus, the promised Messiah, whom Isaiah and other prophets had pointed to for 700 years. I'll say that again, because that truth is the foundation of Advent... Nowhere is God's faithfulness to us more clearly seen than in sending Jesus as a human. Immanuel—God is with us.

I want to cycle back to the questions I asked you to consider last Sunday and which I mentioned earlier this morning: ***“Where in your life are you most in need of God's deliverance today?”*** and ***“What do you desperately need a Savior to do for you?”*** Regardless of your specific answer to those questions, we are all searching for the faithfulness of God.

God's faithfulness is foundational to his nature and character. At least 36 times the Bible refers to God as *faithful*. I'd like to read a number of those Scriptures over us this morning to help solidify in our minds the picture of God's faithfulness. As I read these verses I encourage you to absorb them in your minds and in your hearts and know that whatever you find yourself walking through, God is faithful! I'd like you to read aloud the scriptures on the teal background.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. Deuteronomy 7:9

**Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Psalm 36:5**

LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. Psalm 143:1

LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago. Isaiah 25:1

**Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22 & 23**

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13

**The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. 1 Thessalonians 5:24**

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. 2 Thessalonians 3:3

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9**

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are true and faithful." Revelation 21:5