

## **Lupine**

Isaiah 40:6-8

January 25, 2015

*“Comfort my people,” says our God.*

“Comfort my people,” says our God. “Comfort them!” This is what God wants for his people. This is what God wants for you. Comfort.

What is the opposite of comfort? Discomfort. Distress.

And what cause distress? Fear.

And what are you afraid of?

I want you to picture in your mind the face of the person you fear most ...

If you were a Jew in Isaiah’s time, it might be the face of Nabonidus, king of Babylon, the face of that cruel and pitiless empire.

If you were a Jew in Moses’ time, it might be the face of the Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the face of that cruel and merciless empire.

If you were a Jew in the middle of the last century, it might be the face of Adolf Hitler, chancellor of the third reich, the face of that cruel and inhuman empire.

If you were an African-American in the middle of the century before last, it might be the face of your slave master.

If you were an African-American in the last century, it might be the face of George Wallace or David Duke or any number of hate-spewing white men.

If you were an African-American in this century, it might be the face of a policeman, not any particular policeman, but any particular white policeman with a badge and a gun.

If you were a Syrian refugee, it would probably be the face of Bashar al-Assad.

If you were a Pakistani girl, it would probably be the face of Mullah Fazlullah, leader of the Pakistani Taliban.

If you were a Palestinian living on the east bank of the Jordan, it would probably be the face of an Israeli soldier.

But what face do you picture in your mind? The face of a terrorist? The face of a gang member? The face of a unscrupulous politician? The face of your boss? The face of your abuser? The face of your antagonist? Or just the face of someone who seems to go out of their way to make your life miserable?

Picture the face of the person you fear most and listen ...

*... all human beings are like grass;  
they last no longer than wild flowers.  
Grass withers and flowers fade  
when the Lord sends the wind blowing over them.  
People are no more enduring than grass.  
Yes, grass withers and flowers fade,  
but the word of our God endures forever.*

All human beings are like grass. Isn't that comforting? That the ones who seem so threatening, so formidable, so unassailable will quickly fade away? A puff of wind from God, and they will be gone! But the word of God endures. God's word, God's will, God's promise endures.

Think of the comfort these words would bring to Jewish exiles in Babylon. The days of your enemies are numbered. They will not be able to keep you. God keeps you, and God will bring you home.

Think of the comfort these words would bring to African-American slaves. Your masters are like grass. Soon they will wither and die and be gone, but the word of God endures, the God who claims you, the God who loves you, the God who remembers you and your children and your children's children.

Think of the comfort these words can bring to you. You do not need to fear any person, because human beings are like grass! They will soon be gone, but the God who cares for you remains.

You don't need to be afraid of anybody. But that's not all you are afraid of, is it? Not just other people. Listen again ...

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they last no longer than wild flowers.  
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when the Lord sends the wind blowing over them.  
People are no more enduring than grass.  
Yes, grass withers and flowers fade,  
but the word of our God endures forever.*

All human beings are like grass. We are like grass. We are like wild flowers. Grass withers and flowers fade, and we are gone.

Is that comforting? Or isn't this exactly what we are afraid of? Afraid of withering, afraid of fading, afraid of disappearing, afraid of dying? How can these words be comforting?

Think about your life, at whatever stage, at whatever age, you are. What is it? It is short! And it is sweet! It is short and it is sweet. You are like ... a wildflower.

The photograph on the cover of your bulletin is of a field filled with wildflowers: lupine. This field is about two miles from our home in Blue Hill, Maine. Lupine is a wild flower. We have tried to cultivate lupine in our own gardens with no success. It does best on its own, wild and unruly and beautiful, filling fields and roadsides with huge swaths of purples and pinks and blues and whites. But you better enjoy it while you can -- lupine blooms for only a few weeks in June. It blooms and then it is gone.



That's what we are! Wildflowers. Lupine. We bloom, for a brief time, but we bloom! We bring delight to our maker, and, if we live and bloom well, to each other. Our lives are not something we must carefully and fearfully preserve and protect and hold tight to, because we cannot. Our frailty is our freedom. We do not live forever. We will not live long, but we can live!

Isn't that comforting? Knowing that we will wither, that we will fade, that it's nothing to be surprised at, nothing to worry about, nothing to struggle against, nothing to fear?

Because the word of our God endures. This is the word by which we live. This is the rock on which we stand. This is the promise in which we put our hope. Not relying on our own strength, but on God's. Not relying on our own wisdom, but on God's. Not overreaching the limits of our grasp by trying to guarantee a future only God can guarantee, but instead living today for today for as many today's as we have. This is wisdom and this is comfort, for you and for me.

And for our church. Will our church last forever? Can we guarantee our future? We will wither. We will fade. But the word of our God endures!

It is our job, while we have life, to speak and live, to proclaim and embody, that word.

It is our job, while we have life, to bloom, to show forth the beauty our God has put into us.

It is our job, while we have life, to bring delight to our God and to each other.

Do not, my friends, try to control what you cannot control. And do not fear what you need not fear. Be comforted! You are like grass. You are like a wildflower. But the word of our God endures forever!