

Comfort Must Not Be Cheap

Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Lent

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7



³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience

when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

When Satan opened his mouth for the first time in the Garden of Eden to tell the people lies, he told the people that things would always get better and better for them. "You will not die, you will be like God!" That's what the first lie sounded like. Since then, Satan has never stopped telling people lies that they can be happier, better, more beautiful, or smarter. And we have also learned nothing from our mistakes. We constantly believe the lies of Satan. Even in the Christian church, people believe in the lies of Satan. People actually go around and say that Christians never fight! People not only believe these lies, they even reproduce them. They also support the lies of Satan as they tell others that we Christians are always completely perfect. They do that as they go around with pleasant faces while they hold bitterness in their hearts and no one wants to say or show anything about it. Some manage to maintain this act among their closest family circles. Always pleasant, always polite, always genuine and straightforward...but only on the outside. Inside, a devastating cancer takes over and the people become emotionally and physically sick. No, whoever believes that Christians don't fight should read the letters to the Corinthians. In the beginning of the Christian Church, there was, of all times, a heated argument with none other than the Apostle Paul himself. We don't know the exact particulars anymore, but we know about the argument, and we also know that there was reconciliation. In these short verses, Paul writes after the argument had occurred. It's amazing that Paul writes the word "comfort" 10 times in these same verses. Paul goes even further and describes God Himself as the God of all comfort. Satan doesn't give comfort! No, instead, Satan tries to convey with all his might that we are doing fine and that we don't need any comfort at all. Yes, there are actually always such people who are of the opinion that humans can simply get rid of all suffering and thus be happy. Naturally, we should do everything possible to minimize suffering. But we will never completely remove suffering – neither for the world nor for individuals. That's why comfort is so urgently needed! Satan doesn't want comfort because comfort is very closely related to God! Whoever finds comfort, often finds God. That's why Satan tries to

keep us away and, instead of comfort, gives us regular feelings of happiness that only remain for a little time and therefore can't provide comfort. We can even fool ourselves into thinking that we are actually OK. Just like the sick people who take an overdose of pain pills, we run around, terminally ill and let ourselves become disoriented with every possibility instead of letting God comfort us.

But when God opens His mouth to speak, He speaks the truth. He never tries to deceive people and that's why God always reminds us that we are, without exception, hopelessly lost. This basic truth doesn't just prevent us from looking down on others, it prevents us from keeping away from a fight at all costs too. Yes, arguments can still occur in the Christian church and even in the best families. We won't be spared from these things. But we go about it differently. The God of all comfort shows us in these verses what He sets against conflict and despair. As I said before, in our text today, the word "comfort" is used about 10 times. Now you don't have to comfort anyone who is of the opinion that everything is picture perfect. No, those in great need and despair know that they need comfort. But God doesn't just want to use comfort that is cheap and ineffective against a mountain of suffering. In the language of the New Testament – Greek – comfort means something similar to trust. The paralytic, whose sin Jesus forgives, is to be comforted (Matt. 9:2). The disciples too had to be comforted after they were terrified when Jesus appeared walking on water. And in His farewell speech, Jesus says to us: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). So the word "comfort" does not at all mean that you only comfort a person! Quite the opposite. Fear and despair are looked in the face and taken seriously. But God doesn't want us to experience these things alone. God Himself is and wants to be in the middle with us. Jesus doesn't needlessly say in John 14:16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever." The Helper is the Holy Spirit Himself. He often doesn't take suffering away but He carries us Himself. HE wants to be with us in our suffering and in our hopeless situations, even in our strife, He is to be the important third person who must never be absent. We see these things incorrectly when we think that strife is purely a human possibility. God wants to be a part of it. And comfort is not that people make lazy compromises. Rather, comfort is that God Himself shines into peoples' hearts. And that right there is the great miracle of a Christian. Not that they are such peaceful people and can sort out conflicts. No, absolutely not! The miracle is that they can give their conflicts over to God. The miracle is that God is never very far away. He is even more involved when there are conflicts and nothing is more important to Him than healing hurt and embittered people. That's exactly why Paul didn't write the Corinthians something like this: "Reconcile yourselves with me!" He also didn't say: "Reconcile yourselves with one another!" No! He said: "Reconcile yourselves with God!" (2. Cor. 5:20) God doesn't take the pain away; God doesn't take us out of some suffering situations. We don't always understand that. But I am very sure of one thing. God just waits for us to run into His arms and cry out loudly: "Comfort me!" And what comes next is neither cheap comfort nor a short lived joy. What comes next is a joy that surpasses all human understanding. What comes next is a ray of sunlight for other people because what is remarkable about God's comfort is that the comfort never stays with just us. The comforted can't help but pass on that comfort that they just received! You could almost say that the comforted will themselves be comforted in comforting others. A person who just wants to hold onto comfort themselves is like a silkworm who is wrapped in a cocoon and waits for others to comfort him. This comfort will never come. The comfort that God gives us really wants to search out others. And the person who has experienced suffering themselves, is better qualified to comfort others. A person who has only seen the sunny side of life is not qualified, he can't understand the distress of others and appears helpless and awkward when confronted with the needs of others. Whoever wants to comfort must take on the distress of others. That is truly a difficult path. Paul

speaks here about the suffering of Christ. A Christ who had kept himself far away from the suffering of people could not have freed us from sin, death, and the devil. The true Christ didn't let Himself be scared away from these things. Instead, He shared them with us. It is because Christ shared these things with us and also overcame them that we can be comforted in the first place. In its original sense, comfort means to take courage. I can only take courage when I have a reason and this reason is firmly anchored to Christ on the cross. This is the only reason why Paul can also speak about hope in this passage. In this moment, the Holy Spirit puts Himself on our side and comforts us. What then happens is that He frees us from our cocoons and sharpens our view of what the future holds. In the future, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus stands for us. In the future stands the God of all comfort, who in the end will put everything to good use. Even the things that at first seemed uncertain and lost, God can wonderfully make them right. The only thing we can say and ask is: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort." Amen!