

Advent 2, December 10, 2023  
Text: Isaiah 40:1-11  
Theme: Receive Double!

**In the Prayer of the Day, we ask God to "stir up our hearts, O Lord, to make ready the way of Your only-begotten Son, that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds."** Think about what that means – to serve God with pure minds. It is more than being righteous and holy. Being righteous and holy are good things but you are not able to attain either with your own work. If you look at the Old Testament reading for this weekend, you will hear Isaiah offering us comfort and therein lies the righteousness and holiness we seek.

*Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.*

**God speaks tenderly to the very ones He is disciplining. They are going into exile because of their sin, which primarily was idolatry, putting things of the world above service to God. But understand that God never disciplines us in unrighteous anger. For instance, sometimes people supervising children get angry and discipline them out of unrighteous anger. When I had a K-8 school, I often worked with new teachers. Appropriate discipline is one of the**

**harder minefields to navigate for new teachers. It is so hard to get your feelings and emotions out of the way and ask yourself, "what does this child need from me?" I came upon a teacher who was applying what I thought was pretty harsh discipline to a student and I pulled the teacher into my office and I asked her what she was trying to teach the student with her discipline. Her answer was that she wanted him to learn not to tick her off. That is not an appropriate objective for discipline. Having worked with kids my whole ministry, I understand what she was feeling, but I cannot condone it. Being irritated with a child is a "you problem" not a "them problem." If you cannot maintain calm composure when working with children, you need to take a break and remind yourself that they are children and you are an adult and it is your responsibility to teach them not their responsibility not to annoy you. God shows us how to do it. He always disciplines with one hand while hugging us with the other.**

**In fact, God says that we will receive from Him twice as much good as we did evil! We will receive from the Lord's hand double for all our sins. Knowing that whatever difficulties you are enduring right now will be over and you will receive double in good for whatever bad you did, changes our perspective on serving God. We're not serving God to get something from Him. We are serving**

**God because He has already given us everything. That's what it means to be able to serve with a pure mind. We are able to serve without keeping track of who did more or less than we. We are able to serve without worrying that we might be unfairly taken advantage of. We are able to serve God constantly without concern for anything but serving God because He has already comforted us with double in good for all the bad we did.**

**During this Advent season, we are looking forward to Christ's return when we will receive our full reward. We are headed toward another celebration of Christmas, the celebration of Christ's first coming, and many people struggle at Christmas. Sometimes people consider it their right to be happy and if you are not happy, they seem to think of your unhappiness as an affront to them. They try to control your feelings and emotions so that they can be happy.**

**December is the worst month of the year for introverts. They dread all the parties and celebrations where we are pressed together into claustrophobic spaces and ordered to be merry whether we like it or not. People worry about who is in the room and who is sitting next to whom. Parents worry about money and children worry about not getting the gift they so want.**

**People struggle with Advent and Christmas. They struggle because they have lost focus. Remember the prayer we prayed?**

**Enable us Lord to serve you with a pure mind, a mind that is focused on what you have done for us and what you continue doing for us, a mind that knows that you are already waiting for us with gifts beyond our comprehension when our service here is over. Advent and Christmas are seasons of celebration of God's greatest gift to us: His Son. It is not supposed to be a material celebration. It is a spiritual celebration. It celebrates the amazing gifts we have received from the hand of God, twice the good of what we have done bad. When we have that straight in our heads, it is then that we can enjoy the lights and the music and the food and the friends – only then. Because if our minds are not pure, that is, if we do not understand that God has already comforted us in our afflictions and solved every problem for us, we can never truly celebrate Christmas.**

**If we are focused on what God has done for us, our minds are pure, and we are able to relax and rejoice at Christmas. If we are focused on anything else, we are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd and nothing will ever be good enough or fulfilling enough. Strive to keep you focus on God. Have pure minds and rejoice as Christmas approaches remembering that a double portion of God's blessings are coming your way.**