

**KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH**  
**Sunday Worship, July 28, 2024**  
**Eliana Ziman**

**“Abundant Comfort”**

**Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-2, 9-11, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 (ESV)**

**Isaiah 40:1-2, 9-11**

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>Go on up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good news;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;  
lift it up, fear not;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Behold your God!”

<sup>10</sup>Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

<sup>11</sup>He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead those that are with young.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

**Sermon: Abundant Comfort**

Have you ever met someone who you instantly connected with over a shared experience? I attend Wheaton College, and about a month ago when we were at the Hawaii UCC conference I ran into a Wheaton alum who I had overlapped with by a year! There was an immediate sense of connection between us, and we started joking about the dorms and the things we love about Wheaton, as well as some of the hardships of attending our specific college. Maybe you became friends with someone because of working the same type of job, having the same cultural background, or through sharing similar family dynamics. These bonds formed over shared experiences give insight into someone's life in a special way. We're able to mourn similar losses and rejoice in similar joys. Friendships with people who just *get*

us can be deeply comforting. In the scripture I want to talk about today, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, the apostle Paul describes how the suffering he experienced in his life allowed him to identify with Christ and others in a new way. Persecution and suffering is the context in which Paul writes this letter, both his suffering and the suffering of the people of Corinth. So Paul begins his letter seeking to identify himself with them. But more importantly, he writes how in our suffering we can identify with Christ. And as we share with Christ the experience of suffering, we will also experience comfort. This morning I want to talk first about suffering with Christ, secondly the comfort we receive from God, and finally the comfort we can extend to others.

So first, God cares about our suffering. God doesn't care as an objective observer just watching you suffer, but as Jesus, a man who has suffered it too. Jesus weeps with us in the midst of pain because he loves us and also because he knows what it feels like. Just as Christ experienced physical, emotional, and spiritual pain, we too experience periods of intense pain and grief. And in the middle of this pain, we can hold onto Jesus as someone who experienced the same thing. We are not alone in our sufferings.

In verses 3-4 of this passage, Paul uses the word "all" or "any" three times in a row, saying God is the God of *all* comfort, comforts us in *all* affliction, so that we can comfort those in *any* affliction. There is no kind of suffering that God doesn't see. The deepest insecurities and hurts. The worst physical pains. The most intense griefs or betrayals that come from living in community. Jesus experienced these same things and suffers with us. But God also cares about the smaller ways we experience pain in the world. Now I'm sure a lot of you are used to the cockroaches here on the island, but they are very new for me and the other interns. We've had some very exciting encounters with the really big flying roaches during our time here, and while we can be very brave, I don't think they'll ever stop freaking me out when I see one. At the beginning of the summer I would sometimes pray in the name of Jesus to cast out any cockroaches from the bathroom before I would go in, or before I went into my dark bedroom at night. And so far, literally any time that I've remembered to pray that prayer, I haven't seen any roaches! While I don't know if that's merely a coincidence or if it's truly the power of Jesus's name to rid a place of gross bugs, I've taken it as a reminder of God looking out for me. Whether or not the prayer "works" God is comforting me in even the smallest of my sufferings. God can provide us with comfort and encouragement in even the tiniest and silly little sorrows we have. God cares about, and comforts, all affliction.

Paul in this passage doesn't say, "oh I see how you suffer, but that doesn't matter because God comforts you!" He doesn't ignore the pain or try to remove it as quickly as possible. But he says we are like Christ when we experience suffering. When we feel alone in our grief or shame Christ is right there crying with us. He shares in our suffering. Paul himself experienced this identification with Christ through his suffering, and he encourages us to turn to Christ in the same way. Be honest about the ways you are struggling. Open your heart to God and talk to him about what weighs heavily on your heart. God does care about your pain, no matter how big or small.

Secondly, when we do suffer, God promises to comfort us. Paul continues in this passage to say that just as we suffer abundantly as Christ suffered, so too will we be abundantly comforted by God. The word comfort here means not just what we might understand as a pat on the head "there there" sort of comfort, but also can mean encouragement, or "a calling to one's aid." As we read in Isaiah, the comfort of God is often used to describe God's deliverance of his people. God sits with us, but he also provides us with deep spiritual restoration and healing. Most of you know by now that us interns have a kitten living at the church with us for the summer. While he is sometimes a handful, when he's sleepy it is

wonderful to have him cuddle up on our laps and purr. You might already know this about cats, but research has been done that “the vibrations produced by a cat’s purr have the ability to decrease blood pressure, alleviate stress, and even aid in the process of healing for humans.” A cat curled up next to you can be comforting because they’re cute and soft and physically close to you, but a cat’s purr can also be healing at a much deeper level. I like to think about God’s comfort in this way as well. He both sits next to us to comfort us and also works internally to provide spiritual comfort, healing, and restoration. He isn’t just the band aid to cover up the pain, but is the process by which healing happens.

When we acknowledge the sorrows in our heart, we open ourselves up to the incredible love and comfort of God. I once read somewhere that every time we sin, instead of turning away from Jesus in shame, we should run to him as an opportunity to receive his forgiveness and grace. Let your suffering drive you closer to God, rather than away. While he doesn’t promise to always remove the pain (although sometimes he does), he does promise to be present with us through it, and his presence has the power to restore. We can experience God’s mercy and comfort the most in times of intense pain. It’s like when you’re in the dark for a long time and the fluorescent lights are suddenly turned on, blinding you with the brightness. The more abundant the suffering, the more abundant the comfort can be. Through Christ’s sufferings, death, and the literal resurrection of his body, we have forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and the hope of restoration. What an incredible comfort! While we have heaven to look forward to for the fulfillment of that restoration, the strengthening, resurrecting, sit-with-you comfort of God is with us now. While God hates the fact that we have to experience sadness and pain, the comfort he provides is a foretaste of heaven, when our restoration will be complete and all things are made new.

I remember this one time in high school where I was at a church retreat and was just really going through it. I was sitting by the edge of the lake looking up into the sky and trying to feel how small I was compared to the greatness of God and his creation. But all I could feel was this incredible closeness to God. Instead of feeling small in awe of God’s creation, I felt like God was bringing down himself and all of heaven to hug me. It was a powerful moment of comfort. So where in your life do you need to be still and sit with God? Be honest with God about the sorrows in your life. Sit with your suffering, and allow God to meet you there to comfort you.

While God promises this comfort, often I still struggle to feel it. Paul tells us to endure suffering patiently, because comfort *will* come. But this is also why God gives us community. We don’t live in isolation, or in a bubble with just us and God. God’s comfort can come through the comfort of people. When we suffer, our community can remind us of God’s sovereignty and goodness, and the ways he is still working in the world even when we don’t see it.

So third, when others suffer, God comforts them through us. As image bearers of God and vessels of the Holy Spirit, we as the church can comfort each other with the comfort of God. We all can identify with Christ in our suffering, and we can also identify with each other. While the type of pain and sorrow we experience differs depending on the person, we all live together in a broken world with broken bodies. While suffering has a way of driving us away from God and away from each other, God in his mercy has given us the gift of shared experiences in the world. Our suffering has the potential to drive us toward new communion with God and fellowship with each other.

I love the image of a cup overflowing with water. As we are filled with the comfort of God and with his presence, we will overflow into others. The water of God is never-ending, so when we place ourselves close to him we will pour into others with what we have gained from him. When we receive comfort and restoration and spiritual nourishment from God, that frees us to offer God's comfort to others. We no longer have to rely on ourselves alone to know the right words to say to a friend who's suffering or restore the faith of someone who is questioning. When we are filled with the abundant comfort of God, we become pathways for his comfort to extend to others. Maybe you've experienced this when talking with a friend or stranger where something you say is deeply encouraging to them, or words come to mind that you would never have thought to say. God can use us to speak his comfort. Spending time with God is not just necessary for your own personal spiritual walk but directly impacts how well you are able to love and pour into others.

Once we have received from God, we don't just have the ability to comfort others, but have a *responsibility* to comfort others. Paul says that God comforts us *so that* we may be able to comfort others. Our responsibility to move outwards isn't an extra side thought from God, like "oh and it would be great if you could comfort others too!" No, Paul says that we are comforted *for the purpose* of being able to comfort others. Once we have received from God we *must* move outward. Paul himself is an example of that movement in this passage. He has been persecuted relentlessly and has been overwhelmed with suffering. And yet he praises God for the ways he was comforted, knowing that because of his suffering he is able to encourage others. He wouldn't have been able to encourage the Corinthians if he had not been already encouraged by God. Our suffering can equip us as Christians to be able to care for others the way God cares for us.

Comfort *will* come through suffering. And it will come abundantly. When you suffer, remember that Christ suffers with you. As all-consuming as your struggles are, God's comfort and love can consume you more. In your grief and pain, whether it be emotional, spiritual, or physical, be honest with God and others about your experience. Allow God and your community to sit with you and encourage you. And then look for the ways you can identify with the sufferings of others, and be a conduit of God's comfort and love to them.