

A Vision of Love

Isaiah 40:1–11



Grace and Peace from our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ!

This morning, I would like to show you this picture. This was taken by Jeremy Cowart, a professional photographer in Los Angeles. While in Kiev, Ukraine, he photographed these two people standing outside St. Michael's Church and Monastery.

Let's look at it... and explore it for a moment...

Any ideas or comments?

No, these two young people look preoccupied, don't you think so. These are common people, just like you and me.

But let's focus on what is behind them...it is the wall of the monastery. It rises up above them and is covered with angels. There are so many angels that you can't see all of their faces. The ones closest to them are life size. Behind these two ordinary people is a world of gold, filled with angels and wings and rays of light.

Now, what if these two people would just turn around, you think, they would be amazed at the world that surrounds them. Their ordinary life is filled with the presence of angels. It is almost as if God is inviting them into an overwhelming experience of his personal love.

Unfortunately, what we see in this photograph often happens in our lives. We are so preoccupied with work that we never truly see the wonder of God's ways. For this reason, our text from Isaiah is a blessing this morning. Isaiah in the Old Testament reading this morning, offers us an overwhelming vision of angels. He calls us today to stop and to listen. If you do that, you will discover a beautiful thing. Today, Isaiah offers you a vision of God's love.

Through the words of Isaiah, God proclaims to us His overwhelming mission of personal love.

Now when you read our text of meditation, at first glance, you will notice that there are no angels explicitly mentioned. We are not given a vision of heaven with God seated on a throne, surrounded by thousands upon thousands of angels. In fact, Isaiah only gives us a voice, the voice of God that he hears.

Earlier, though, when Isaiah first received his call, he received a glimpse of the heavenly council. He went into the temple only to discover that somehow it had become the throne room of God. He says: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Is. 6:1-3). So great was this God that the mere hem of his robe filled the entire temple, and Isaiah was amazed. But this God called Isaiah to speak, and he gave him the words to say. Words of judgment upon Israel!

But, Isaiah receives another commission as well. Just this one will not be asking you to turn your attention to the throne room of God, to the thousands upon thousands of angels, covering their faces and hovering in the air. Instead, he wants you to hear what this God is saying. Why? Because what God says is even more wonderful and glorious than the angels he speaks to. This time, God is bringing comfort to His people.

Hear the overwhelming mercy of God: “Comfort, comfort my people,” says God. God issues his command. Not once but twice. God is emphatic about the work that he is about to do. Also, notice that the command is spoken in the plural. “Comfort, comfort my people.” God is not commanding one lone angel to bring a word of comfort to earth. No, God is commanding more than one, many, if not all of them. “All of you, comfort my people,” God is saying. “All of you, bring comfort to them.” God is so desirous of bringing comfort to His people that He sends a heavenly host to do His bidding.

They are to speak to His people, to proclaim that their exile is over, their sin is pardoned, and they have peace with their God.

This overwhelming mission, once given to angels, continues to happen in our midst today. Advent reminds us of God’s overwhelming mission. John the Baptizer was out in the wilderness calling all people to repent and prepare for the Lord. His work was a Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and his words revealed one greater than him. One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is that one, sent from his Father to die for our sins. He rose and ascended to his Father to be seated on the heavenly throne. Jesus rules, and as long as this world endures, his mission continues. He sends his Spirit to equip us, his people, to join in his overwhelming mission of mercy to the ends of the earth.

Not only is this an overwhelming mission, but it is also a mission of personal love.

Notice how the first way the angels are to bring comfort to God’s people is by speaking tenderly to them. Literally, they are to “speak upon the heart.” This is the language of personal love. The language of a man in love with a woman. The language of God, who is in love with His people. Though His people have strayed from Him and though they have justly suffered His judgment, God continues to seek them out. In this text, we get a glimpse of God, sending out messengers to speak to His people of a personal love.

This text, however, is only a foretaste of a far more personal love of God. Advent is preparing us for Christmas, when God revealed the most amazing act of personal love. In a few days we will be reminded how angels filled the heavens to announce this event. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to take on human flesh, to suffer the wrath of God for all sin, and to bring all people back into a relationship with their heavenly Father. This is the message God communicates today, a message of personal love, spoken in his Word and also spoken personally by a preacher he has sent, today, to you.

Have you ever noticed how talk of religion can often become divisive? The ways of God are different from the ways of our world, and religious speech is often heard as an attack on others rather than as an invitation to participate in a new way of life.

Today, however, God invites you to take part in His overwhelming mission of personal love. Having experienced His forgiveness in your life, having received His Holy Spirit, you are equipped to join your voice to the chorus of witnesses who speak of

His love. Angels surround you as you serve God in the world, and they look forward to singing a song of joy over one sinner who repents (Lk 15:10).

Conclusion:

When you look at Jeremy Cowart's photograph, it is interesting to see how near the angels are to our world. In fact, it almost looks like one of the angels is entering our world.

One angel stands there, behind the man in the suit and tie. In one hand, the angel carries a lily. In the other hand, the angel holds a staff, and his forefinger is extended. It reaches out from the mural to point to the young man in front of him, standing there, staring off into the distance.

In Renaissance art, one angel often carries a lily. Gabriel. The angel God sent to Mary to announce that she would bear God's Son. How beautiful that this angel, so close to the incarnation, is also so close to this young man.

God sent his Son into this world for individual people, like this young man. Though they may not be attending to God in the world, God is attending to them. Sending His Son to forgive their sins and then sending His angels, sending His prophets, sending His pastors, sending His people to join in this mission of love.

God's overwhelming mission, so personal in Jesus, remains personal today as God sends you to be a messenger, bearing His word of good news to others.