

NORTH BALWYN UNITING CHURCH

SUNDAY 4 DECEMBER 2011

Rev. Anneke Oppewal

Isaiah 40: 1-11, Psalm 85; Mark 1: 1-8

“Comfort, Comfort”

Holding on to God can help us face the challenges of life like a comfort blanket can help us when we face our fears as a child. But God is more than a comfort blanket says Isaiah, God is a power at work who keeps creating new opportunities, bringing about new challenges, tirelessly working for peace and justice in the world.

The Jewish people are in Exile - hope of return becoming real with the fall of the babylonian empire - the persians might let them go back! And Isaiah tells them to just hold on a little while longer!

But do they want to go home once it has become possible? It is highly probable some hesitated. The road was long and hazardous and that not many made it back in the end shows their fear and hesitation was all too real.

And what for they must have asked themselves. Life wasn't so bad in Babylon and many had made a living for themselves, built houses, integrated in society, accepted their fate.

We heard the story of the sea lion. ["The Sea Lion" from *The Journey of Desire* by John Eldredge]

A sea lion in the desert who had this persistent dream about an ocean as wide as the desert where he truly belongs. Initially he reasons with himself that there can't be such a place, that it would be impossible to find it any way and that the oasis he has found with a puddle to dip his flippers in every now and again is the most any one can expect of life. But the dream wins and at the end of the story he decides to go and find the ocean, no matter how difficult or hazardous the journey.

Isaiah calls his people to do the same: to take the chance and trust God instead of accepting a life that is less than satisfactory when compared to the dream God has given them to dream.

That same call comes to us in advent: To go trusting that the dream God has given us can come true and believing that he will support us and guide us on the way.

The question is: Do we hesitate to embark on a journey with God away from where we are? In a Church that is called to change radically or die this is a very pertinent question. In a society where we can close our eyes to injustice and suffering all too easily this again is a very pertinent question: Are we like those people in exile who had resigned themselves to being in a place that did not match their dream completely? and let ourselves be satisfied with that?

Every time we celebrate communion we are reminded of God's dream for us: A life of peace and sharing, of openness and care, of nurture and plenty where we can be safe with each other. Every time we celebrate communion we are encouraged to not give up on that dream but keep traveling towards it, even where the road may look challenging and we may not be certain of how or when we will get there. Amen.

