

Hope

Merciful God, who sent your messengers the prophets to preach repentance and prepare the way for our salvation: Give us grace to heed their warnings and forsake our sins, that we may greet with joy the coming of Jesus Christ our Redeemer; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Look

As we look around the world, it can be easy to feel despair. People all around us are suffering. Many people live in the midst of war and famine, or are oppressed under harsh dictators. But even in our own backyard, the depravities are plenty – hunger, homelessness, sexual harassment and aggression, systemic racism.

1. Do you pay much attention to the challenges of the world? Why or why not?
2. What do you think is the most pressing concern of our time? Why?
3. How do you feel when you read or watch the news?

Book Isaiah 40:1-11

The people of Israel have lived in oppression for more than 70 years, banished from their homeland and dispersed far from one another. They wondered if God had forgotten and abandoned them. But, the prophet Isaiah reminds them that God will bring equality to all people – the valley will be lifted up and the mountain made low. Everyone – every single person – will see the glory of the Lord.

1. What does the prophet mean when he says that the valley will be lifted up and the mountain made low?
2. How might those words be of comfort to the people of Israel? How are they a comfort to you?
3. As the Israelites continue to wait for God's glory what are they supposed to do? What does it mean to prepare the way of the Lord?

Took

We are still waiting for the words of the prophet to be true. We are still waiting for all people to be equal, for everyone heard and be heard, we are all waiting for a world in which there are no more 'haves' and 'have nots'. But waiting is an *active* word. In our waiting, we are to prepare the way.

1. How do we make the road straight? How do we begin to level the mountains and bring the valleys up?
2. What kind of disruption does it cause to our lives and the lives of those around us when we try to make the road straight and level? Why does it make people so uncomfortable when we try to do that?
3. How does waiting in an active way help bring us hope when it can be so easy to feel despair?