

# Speaking to the soul



## Forgiveness

**“Comfort, comfort my people,” says your God. “Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned.” Isaiah 40:1-2**

When disaster strikes it's often without warning. A death, a We all make mistakes, but some have far greater impact than others. Many mistakes are of minor importance, and are soon forgotten, but others can change the whole direction of life from that moment. The people of Jerusalem and Judah had made a long succession of disastrous decisions but in this passage God told them that things were going to change because he would forgive them.

When we make mistakes, and especially when they have long-term implications, it is easy to imagine that there is no hope. But God is always in the business of restoration. He is always looking for ways of bringing salvation and renewal. This is truly a message of comfort and one which our world desperately needs to hear. I have spent many, many hours of my life with people who have tried to persuade me that they were beyond God's help. Their lives had gone from bad to much, much worse and they couldn't imagine that there was a way back. I think particularly of prisoners I have met who have been very happy to share their life story but had drawn the conclusion that they were beyond being helped.

I particularly love the word 'tenderly' in today's Bible passage. When God comes to us in our failure he doesn't come stridently and critically, but with tenderness and love. The truth is, we can never deserve God's forgiveness. It's always a gift and, incredibly, the Bible tells us that he is willing to forgive us however badly messed up our lives might be. God simply looks for our willingness to own up to our sin, to accept his forgiveness and to change our way of life. They were comforting words for the people of Jerusalem long ago – and they still are.

## **QUESTION**

What is your own experience of God's forgiveness?

**PRAYER**

Lord God I confess that I have made many mistakes. I accept your gift of forgiveness and ask you to fill me with your Spirit as I seek to live my life in step with you. Amen

*Photograph - St Columba's Parish Church, Knock, Belfast*

