**[1]** 4-week series on 2nd Corinthians
Week #1: Comfort Abounds
Scripture: 2 Cor. 1:1-11

**[2]** Titus and Paul meet near Macedonia as their routes crisscross in Asia Minor. Titus informs Paul that the previous conflict in the Corinthian Church is now much alleviated. They are now doing much better and are ready to hear from you and to be reconciled to you. Good News! Exciting News! Paul sees in this news of reconciliation a foretaste of God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ. Paul’s pastoral spirits are lifted up inside of him. It is time to write a letter to the church giving thanks for that reconciliation and offering the Consolation of Christ to all sides involved in the conflict.

Paul’s message is that we learn about consolation from the God of all consolation; we learn consolation from a Loving God who consoles us so that we can console others. Speaking for Timothy and for himself, Paul declares that this holy consolation is as real as any pain we might experience. This holy consolation is abundant through Christ Jesus, just as abundant, if not more abundant than their sufferings. He then extends the declaration: “And, you, “O Church’ share in that same consolation.” We experienced so much suffering in Asia (e.g. Ephesus), says Paul, so much that we “despaired of life itself (v 8),” but God “rescued” us from what we thought was surely a “sentence of death (v 9).” “But, your many prayers, O’ Church’ helped us, and we are so very grateful for your prayers (v 11).”

**[3]** Literally, in the ancient language, “God who from such a great death has delivered us and will continue to deliver us; the One in whom we have hope will deliver us yet again.” We are left to only surmise what this “great death” might have referred to. Perhaps, the ‘great death’ may refer to ‘having fought the wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32),’ or ‘the riot at the shrine of Artemis’ (Acts 19:23-41). We do not know exactly. We might think that Paul was demonstrating some overconfidence in his ability to escape these types of danger; he is here expressing trust in God to deliver him in any situation.

So, regarding stewardship lessons, we see in these verses a flow of gratitude for the blessings we have received and will receive, and blessings which we are even now receiving. God blesses Abram to be a blessing, and then immediately extends this to others who bless Abram (Gen. 12:2-3); and Paul declares, in like manner, that God has consoled him, so that he can console others, and extends this consolation to those who console Paul himself. So, we share in the abundant blessings and consolations which we receive through Christ Jesus our Lord.

We also share in the reconciling work which the larger church does on our behalf, what apostles like Paul and Timothy have accomplished which flows down to us through the love of Christ. God reconciles us so that we can reconcile others, and extends that reconciliation to others who are part of our reconciliation. It is a full circle experience! Our stewardship, likewise, is a full
circle experience! Truly what goes around comes around; but also what comes around goes around!

Returning to our discussion of 2nd Corinthians, the verses imply that God will (*rhýomai* draw, snatch) us (right) out of the danger, (right) out of the oppression, (right) out of the suffering and pain, to safety and comfort, to God’s self.. There is an immediate aspect to the deliverance implied in our English phrase “right out of,” implying that God will not take his time in delivering us, but will do so quickly. In Colossians 1:13, the writer suggests that this drawing out is like unto a transport, transporting us from the power of darkness to the power inside the kingdom of the Son, literally, from one place to another quickly, in the shadow of an eye blink. Or we can think of how the Holy Spirit transported Philip away to Azotus, after his baptism of the Ethiopian minister (Acts 8:39). On Christ, we set our hope, and, with this hope, our hope for you is “unshaken (v 7).” Such hope is steadfast (bébaios*)* because we can fully trust that hope and in that hope we know we walk on solid ground. In our stewardship, we walk in faith toward higher ground.

**[4]** When Paul speaks of the comfort he received in abundance from God, at least one scholar thinks he might be thinking of an incident that occurred in Troas, not far from Ephesus. We generally skip over this incident in our reading of Acts, but we should not. We miss a really interesting account of a typical visit by Paul while traveling from place to place. In this story, we get an image of Paul as a man on a mission, a man on a hurried schedule, getting off the ship briefly, and then hurrying to get back on it to sail to the next destination. Sometimes, he might even skip going to a place (or re-arrange his schedule) where he knew there might be conflict, not so much to avoid the conflict, but ‘out of forbearance’ knowing that the time was not right to make the visit. He might need to give himself time to heal, or give the church time to heal, or both. “The story begins: ‘Paul was holding a discussion with them, and since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the room (they were three floors up in an upstairs room). A boy named Eutychus was sitting in the window and listening, but began to fall asleep at the late hour, while listening to Paul. He fell out the window to the ground three stories below. Those who rushed to his side below exclaimed that he was dead. Paul interrupted the discussion, descended the stairs to the ground, and bending over him, took him in his arms. “Do not be alarmed; there is still life in this boy.” They took the boy away still alive, and Paul returned upstairs to continue the discussion and to have communion with the group, and he continued his conversation until the dawn and then left, to continue his journey. (Acts 20).

Luke then declares that they were all “not a little comforted” that the boy was still alive. This was something of an understatement, don’t you think? Let’s just say it outright, ‘this story has an abundance of comfort inside of it.’ It is perhaps not a deliverance from ‘great death,’ so much as it is a deliverance from senseless death, but just as important as any other, even if the healing was taken in stride as they continued the meeting upstairs. Oh, just another day in the neighborhood, just another miracle, let’s move on. Not a little comfort, you say! Just another daily incident in the ho-hum life of Paul? I don’t think so. It was a great comfort; it was comfort in abundance!

**[5]** Comfort and Consolation (*paráklēsis*) abounds in Jesus Christ! This is a message we especially need to hear today! Literally, from the ancient Greek language, ‘consolation’ is personal encouragement; it is also a close personal call, a holy urging from someone who is close beside you. It can be a voice in your ear, encouraging you to do the right thing in the circumstances. It can be a voice from behind you, guiding your spirit step by step. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon praises the baby Jesus as the long-awaited, ‘consolation of Israel’; it is the same word being used in this letter from Paul. Our Advocate, our Paraclete, is the Consolation which abounds in our midst. Jesus is our Savior! Our Comfort from the God of all comfort! God never leaves us without comfort, even when we are terribly grieved at our many losses, or our most recent great loss. And today, we need that comfort more than ever. To name our current condition, we are at an inflection point, a decision point, where results of our election could go either way in the blink of an eye. We are also in a period of great grief over the way things used to be, over the ways that brought great comfort to us day in and day out. Comfort for this great grief comes in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Christ is a Comfort that abides in abundance, a gift from the God of all Comfort, the only Comfort that can spiritually meet the great sufferings we are experiencing. Such a Comfort wraps itself around each pain, and eases the distress in that pain.

We can tap into this great Comfort like we might tap into a radio broadcast, just by being receptive to it, but placing our receivers into the path of the broadcast and tuning into it.
It is a constant broadcast of Love and Grace and it reaches around the globe, to the farthest reaches of the earth. The signal never wanes. Storms do not diminish it. The God of all Comfort lifts us up in mercy and holds us in compassion. Our adoption into that Comfort is as steadfast as if we were born with it. This Comfort undergirds our reconciliation, our blessings, our stewardship, and stands behind our peace.

So, if or when you feel despair, or panic or anger setting in, start by thanking God for the Comfort of Christ Jesus, the Comfort of all Comforts, the Encouragement of all Encouragements. Just as the prayers of the Corinthian Church encouraged Paul and Timothy, so our prayers are a Comfort to many surrounding us who need our prayerful help to weather the storms of fear and change. The Mother/Father God of all Comfort will sustain us in all circumstances and will provide us the peace beyond all understanding to comfort our souls. This Comfort abides in Yes rather than No (2 Cor 1:19); it persists in the positive rather than in the negative. Rather than comfort from something, it is comfort to something, call us out of the shadows and into the light. Walk forward in the Comfort of God’s Spirit and the path will always rise to meet you and you will never walk alone.

**[6]** In Philippians, Paul speaks of a “fellowship of Christ’s sufferings (Phil. 3:17), but we could equally speak of a “fellowship of Christ’s consolation.” It is a fellowship based on reconciliation, upheld by blessings received and given. It is a fellowship of servant stewardship. Paul writes: “If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing of the Spirit, compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete, be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.” (Phil. 2:1-2). The Consolation which comes through Christ Jesus is an expansive power that continues to pour itself out on others. It is well-suited to their needs and situations, designed to their context. This Consolation increases day by day until it shines forth brightly in our dispositions. Christ Jesus channels an “everlasting consolation” (2 Thess. 2:16-17) from God that overflows any human boundaries. So, as the Body of Christ, we are a fellowship of Comfort to the world.

How then do we represent the fellowship of consolation to our world? There are numerous ways. By keeping the faith even in tough and critical times. By keeping love for others uppermost in our hearts. By keeping ourselves safe and healthy. By keeping unity as our guiding star. By keeping in touch with each other during times of physical distancing. By keeping alert
to the needs of our community and the needs of each person in it, whether it be for food or shelter or hope. We are the fellowship of Christ in an uncomfortable world with a message of Comfort, Hope, and Grace for all. Alleluia! Amen.