

Islands Study Conference (pm)

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[0 : 00] Can we turn back to that passage we read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, the last chapter, Isaiah chapter 66. And we can read again from verse 12.

For thus says the Lord, behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream. And you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip and bounced upon her knees.

As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you. You shall be comforted in Jerusalem. You shall see and your heart shall rejoice, your bones shall flourish like the grass.

And the hand of the Lord shall be known to his servants. And he shall show his indignation against his enemies.

And particularly this evening I want us to focus on the words of verse 13. And even within that, really on the first part of the sentence there.

[1 : 13] As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you. And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you. And the I there, of course, is God speaking. So the Lord is going to comfort his people.

Let me begin by asking you a question. Should we address God as mother? Nobody's fallen off their chair.

I expected that some of you might in Harris and Lewis, with Lewis folks here as well. Some of you might be shocked by the very question. Asking the question.

Part of the reason I ask the question is because over the weekend at the conference up in the hotel, I've been sharing with the folks who've gathered there some of the passages from Scripture, some of the passages from the Old Testament in particular, that we might call passages that bring forth the motherly, bring out something of the motherly aspects of the Godhead, the maternal aspects of the Lord.

[2 : 40] And that then raises the question, well, if God speaks about himself, as he clearly does in quite a number of the Scriptures, as being like a mother, that raises the question, should we then address him as mother?

And of course, in these days of great political correctness and equality across the world, there are, it wouldn't surprise you to know, that there are a number of feminist theologians in the world who advocate that we should, as well as speaking of a God, we should also speak of a goddess.

We should use the feminine term goddess as an alternative to God. And many of these feminist theologians would actually want us to pray to God as mother.

So that's why I ask the question. The main reason why we wouldn't do that, of course, is that we are given absolutely no encouragement whatsoever in the Scriptures to do that.

Yes, the Lord speaks about himself as in some aspects, in some respects, being like a woman, but we're given, there is no Scripture at all in the Old Testament or the New Testament where he reveals himself as being the mother.

[4 : 12] Again and again, in the Old Testament, even he speaks of himself as father, as father of Israel, as father of David, as father of the Davidic kings.

And in some of the prophets, they begin to address God and Isaiah begins to address God as father. And that's before we get into the New Testament where Jesus encourages us, of course, in the Lord's Prayer to begin, as he sets the pattern before us, to address God as father, our father in heaven.

But nowhere in the whole panorama of Scripture from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, not even once in all of that Scripture is God addressed as mother.

And nowhere from the beginning to the end of the Bible are we encouraged to call on God as mother.

So I hope that that's clear to us. But having said that, as those of us who've been involved in the conference will have seen, here and there in the Scriptures, we do actually find language that we tend to associate much more with women than we do with men.

[5 : 42] That kind of language being attributed to God, to the Father, to the Heavenly Father. We find motherly characteristics being ascribed to God.

We find motherly actions being attributed to God. And that shouldn't surprise us because the very opening chapter of the Bible tells us that human beings have been made in the image of God. Male and female made in the image of God. So both men and women image what is in God. We reflect God. We image God. The character of God. And by the very nature of the differences between the sexes that are obvious to us and that are spoken also in the Scripture, and here I should say I'm speaking in general terms.

I'm not talking, I'm not saying that this is true of every single man and every single woman, but in general terms, some characteristics of God are more to the fore in men than in women.

[6 : 53] But it's equally true that some characteristics of God are more to the fore in women than they are in men. And we have to acknowledge that.

And tonight I want us to focus on one of these characteristics that are more to the fore. They're not absent from men, thankfully.

We were singing about that in Psalm 103. But they're more to the fore, I think we would all recognize, in women. we're going to look at one of these motherly qualities of God.

We might even say one of the motherly qualities of the Father, of the Heavenly Father. Because here, in our text this evening, we have that verse 13.

As one whom his mother comforts, I will comfort you. So the comfort that God gives is likened there to the comfort that a mother gives, a human mother gives, to her child.

[8 : 11] The NIV puts the translation at this point, as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.

So that's what we're looking at this evening. But as kind of the background to all of that, and that's one of the reasons why I read the opening verses of Isaiah chapter 40 at the beginning of the service, those of you who know this whole section of Isaiah, particularly from chapter 40 on to the end of Isaiah here in chapter 66, will recognize that there is a recurring theme that comes through almost every chapter of that whole section of Isaiah, and the recurring theme is that of comfort. It starts there in Isaiah chapter 40. Some of you may recognize that from Handel's Messiah. Some of you may recognize it from Scripture that you learned in Sunday school or that you learned in day school, as was the case with an old guy like myself.

Comfort, comfort, my people, says your God. It's God who is setting out his agenda there at the beginning of Isaiah chapter 40.

He wants to speak comfort to his people who have been in a difficult situation. Many other verses that we could look at.

[9 : 45] one of the ones that we'll be familiar with is from chapter 61, which begins, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me, and he goes on to list all the things for which the Lord has anointed him, and amongst those things for which the Lord has anointed him, he says, He has anointed me to comfort all who mourn.

And these words of Isaiah 61 were true of the prophet Isaiah himself, they've been true of many of the other prophets of God's people, they've been true of the preachers, many preachers down through the centuries, but above all they are true of Jesus Christ because Jesus himself tells us that he is actually the one in and through whom that scripture has its fulfillment.

Do you remember how just shortly after his baptism, after he returns from the time of temptation in the wilderness at the hands of Satan, Luke in his gospel in chapter 4, he goes into the synagogue on the Sabbath day in his hometown, his home village of Nazareth at the very beginning of his ministry, and he reads from the scroll of Isaiah, and he reads very specifically from Isaiah chapter 61, the chapter that talks of him having been anointed, and that's what's happened at the River Jordan.

He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit of God, the Father has ridden the heavens, and the Spirit, he has sent the Spirit down upon the man Christ Jesus, and he has been anointed for his ministry.

And Jesus, having read those verses from Isaiah 61, he says, today, today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

[11 : 46] So God sends out prophets, he sends out preachers, he sends out evangelists, he sends out messengers of one kind or another to comfort his people, but above all, he actually comes himself.

God comes himself, God comes to us, to those who need comfort, he doesn't just send people to us to speak about that, he comes himself in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, and he comes to comfort, to comfort us, to comfort his people.

And something of that personal ministry of comfort by the Lord is something that we begin to find even in the Old Testament, in Old Testament times, because in all these chapters in Isaiah, not least, what we find is in the final analysis that it's not Isaiah that's going to do the comforting, it's God himself who's going to do the comforting.

That's what our text speaks of. It's not saying I'm sending Isaiah to comfort you, he's saying I will comfort you. That's God who is speaking, God speaking maybe to your heart tonight, he's saying I will comfort you.

Not the preacher that I'm sending, not the teachers that I'm sending, I will come myself and I will come into your experience, into your life, into your heart, into your home, and I will be in the kind of comfort through the forgiveness of sins that we were thinking of there at the beginning in Isaiah chapter 40.

[13 : 26] And this evening then I wonder if you know that comfort in your own experience, comfort that comes into our experience as we experience the touch of God in our lives, as the Spirit of God comes into our lives and we experience His forgiveness, the forgiveness of our sins.

Are you here tonight and know nothing of that comfort? do you want this God to come to you? Not satisfied with religion, not satisfied with ticking the box, that's me, that's another Sunday, I can tell my mum that I've been in church another Sunday, no it's not about that, it's have we encountered the God that is spoken of here and has He begun to comfort you?

Comfort then is a recurring theme. And here it's highlighted as a motherly characteristic, a motherly quality, as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.

I think what the Lord is doing there, He's saying that as He begins to speak to us about comfort, He's looking around the planet, He's looking around the human community and He sees, if you like, He sees the best analogy that there is on the face of this earth to that which He's talking about and He sees it in the relationship between a mother and her child.

Of course, the comfort that He's speaking of is far greater than all of that. And He shows that clearly in His Scripture. But it's in the mother's comforting of her child that He sees the closest analogy on the face of this earth.

[15 : 39] And He latches on to it and He says, you know what a mother's comfort is like? Well, that's what I'm bringing to you and far better, far greater because I am God, the God who comforts.

So we're going to think a little bit in the rest of our service this evening about how does a mother comfort her children as one whom his mother comforts.

So I will comfort you. First thing I want us to be aware of is that a mother comforts out of a heart that is full of compassion and pity.

Whenever a mother comforts her child, her actions are the overflow of her heart. She just does it instinctively because it's in here and it flows out in her hands and it flows out in her words.

it flows out in her actions because it comes from the depth of her being. And so it is with the Lord as well. Comfort and compassion go closely together.

[17 : 00] Lots of verses from Isaiah itself where we could see that. One of them is chapter 49 verse 13 where the Lord, where we read, sing for joy, O heavens, exult, O earth, break forth, O mountains, into singing.

Why all this jubilation? Because the Lord has comforted his people. What does that mean? He has compassion on his afflicted.

Comfort and compassion are just parallel terms there in that verse. Whenever the Lord sees his church or a single individual, a child of his, when he sees a child of his in difficulty or distressing circumstances, even when these are of his or her own making, then sooner or later he will move with compassion towards that child of his.

He will move with compassion. He will be moved into action. Sometimes to transform the circumstances. Perhaps more often just to break into those circumstances with his empowering grace just to get his people through.

but his comforting activity is motivated by the way he is in his being. This is the way he is.

[18 : 39] He cannot be otherwise. This is the way God is. It's from the overflow of his vast heart of compassion and mercy that never ends as we were singing and love.

One of the interesting things about the Hebrew word for compassion is that it's very closely related to the Hebrew word for a womb. And that highlights I think the fact that compassion is most readily seen in those who have a womb.

It's most readily seen in women in general terms. So much so that one recent Old Testament scholar has described compassion as womb love.

womb love. Perhaps above all this womb love is if you like it's associated with that special tie that pity that compassion that a woman has for the children she has carried for nine months within her womb.

Her womb has been the bedroom of that child. It's been the gymnasium of that child. It's been the breakfast room of that child as well. It's been all of that. It's been the child's whole world.

[20 : 05] And when the child leaves that womb there is a sense in which the mother's womb love goes after that child and if the mother's compassion cannot have the child back within her then the mother's love wants at least and compassion wants at least to have that child as close as possible and to embrace that child as closely as possible in lots of different ways.

Protecting the child, providing for the child, soothing, comforting the child. The close connection between compassion and comfort.

I think part of what this verse is teaching us, verse 13 of Isaiah 66, is that God is like that too. You might never have thought about God in that way in all your life.

God might still be remote to you but one of the things that comes through powerfully, particularly in these Old Testament books of the prophets, I think of Isaiah, I think of Hosea, is just this closeness of God and this warmth of God in the experience of his people, even in Old Testament times, they could think of that and talk about that.

He's moved with compassion from the depths of his eternal heart of compassion towards all his children in all their afflictions, even those afflictions that they have brought upon themselves.

[21 : 49] Think of the Israelites in Egypt. In one sense, their experience of affliction in Egypt was due to the violence of Pharaoh, if you like, but in another sense, we read in various passages in the Old Testament that the Israelites followed the idols of the Egyptians.

They worshipped the idols of the Egyptians. they had gone astray, but God saw them in their affliction, he heard their cries, and he says, I've come down to comfort them by redeeming them, by saving them, by bringing them out of Egypt, out of that oppressive system.

So that's the first thing. A mother comforts her child out of a heart that pumps with compassion. And so it is with God, only with God, of course, it's much more, it's much more than that, he's the eternal one.

There's no end of his compassion, there's no beginning of his compassion, there are no dimensions to his compassion, measure, measureless, boundless, free.

A second way in which, in practical terms, a mother comforts her child on a daily basis is by washing the child, by cleaning the child, just taking that child out of the smelly mess that he makes for himself that he can't take himself out of.

[23 : 29] And I'm talking there about just a soiled nappy. Baby can't get himself out of a soiled nappy. Baby can't do anything about that, it's the mother, caring mother will do that.

Take him out, extricate him from that mess, and wash away all the traces of filth, and then apply the powder, and I don't know if they still do it nowadays, pseudoclem, I think we had in our day, and then a new nappy, and a dry nappy, a comfortable nappy.

And our heavenly father, comforts each of his children like that every day. The mess that we get ourselves into, because of our sins, sins of thought, sins of word, tongue, with our wife, with our children, with our parents, with our workmates, with our neighbours, which of us doesn't get into a mess almost every day with these things?

things. And he takes us out of that and cleanses us, washes us, washes his children, day by day, comforting us in that way.

And maybe for someone here this evening, that's the main way in which you're going to experience the heavenly father's comfort, his motherly comfort, as he takes you from the fearful pit, from the mighty clay, as he takes you out of your sin, as he extricates you from that ball, that peep ball, and just washes you, and cleans you, put on a new set of clothes, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and sets you on your feet, on Christ the rock.

[25 : 22] A mother comforts her child as well, often by singing soothing lullabies, over her head, and you've been there, those of you who are mothers, done that again and again, when the kids are frightened, when the wee ones are frightened, when they're sobbing their hearts out, for one reason or another, or they're distressed by some experience that they've had, we just take them up, the mother particularly takes them up in her hands, and she rocks them, and she rocks them gently, it's all shh, peace, peace, and sometimes there'll be some singing of that as well.

Whenever a mother does that, or indeed a father, whenever a mother or father does that, of course, they're just imaging God. I don't know if you've ever come across a wonderful version, Zephaniah 3 and verse 17, some of you might not even know where Zephaniah is in the Old Testament, but if you don't know, look it up afterwards, Zephaniah 3 and verse 17, I don't know what it says, God will rejoice over you with gladness.

You ever thought of God like that? God rejoicing over you with gladness? It goes on in that verse, he will quiet you by his love.

And that's the picture. He takes you in his arms, and he's saying, shh, it's rocking you. Peace, my peace, I give to you.

He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will quiet you by his love, he will exalt over you with loud singing. Well, maybe you shouldn't do the loudness and the singing with the child, but there's singing anyway.

[27 : 12] Why do we love singing? We love singing because we are made in the image of a singing God. Perhaps for someone here this evening, this is the way in which you're going to experience the heavenly father's what we might call motherly comfort.

He just sweeps you up in his arms. He comes to you and says if you've been under conviction of sin or something you've been really distressed by something in your experience and he sweeps you up in his loving comforting arms and he really says to you peace, peace, my peace I give to you not as the world gives or anyone in the world gives, give I unto you let not your heart be troubled neither let it be afraid.

Singing sweet and soothing lullabies over your head. Another way in which a mother comforts her child of course is by feeding and the kids, the babies let you know when they need feeding and they loudly cry.

Can't do anything about feeding themselves but they know how to, if you like, pray to their mommy to use this picture. They're crying out to the mommy, crying out for that food.

They know that if they cry the food will come or they'll be taken to the food and the mother lifts the child and brings her, the child brings her to her breast and the child just sucks and sucks and sucks away until the eyes begin to roll in the head and the belly's full and it's warm and they nod off to sleep.

[29 : 08] You have something of that in verse 11 which speaks of, in fact in verse 11 it's Jerusalem, the church is, if you like, the woman there and the individual is being satisfied in the body of the kirk as it were, being fed to satisfaction in the body of the kirk that you may nourish and be satisfied from her consoling breast.

God is, if you like, God then goes on to say, as one whom his mother comforts in that kind of way, I will comfort you.

Have you ever thought of God like that? God that's the kind of God we have. And maybe that's the way in which you're going to be experiencing something of the comfort of God this evening.

Or maybe you've experienced it in the past. You've been hungry for something, for God to break fresh into your life and somewhere in your own private devotions or listening to a tape of psalm singing or hymn or whatever or in the midst of a sermon, just a word has come alive for you and you just latch on to it and you just feed on it until your soul is full and satisfied with all the rich teaching that it has for you from the Lord himself.

Whether the milk of the word of a young Christian or the strong meat of the word as an older Christian and to reflect the words of the psalmist in Psalm 36, you've drunk deeply from the rivers of God's delight and the word for delight there in Psalm 36 by the way is the plural of the word for

Eden.

[31 : 21] So it's that's from God we get the things of paradise, we get the things of the eternal Eden to satisfy our souls.

So a mother comforts her child out of a heart that is full of pumping, full of loving compassion. She comforts her child by washing and cleansing the child not just every day but again and again through the day.

Sometimes by singing sweet and soothing lullabies or by feeding the child. Another way in which a mother comforts her child is by welcoming back the prodigal.

I don't know many here all that well but I assume that in a gathering of this size there will be people with adult children who have caused you a great deal of pain.

A great deal of anguish, maybe disappointment as well, maybe lots of tears, lots of sleepless nights, yet your heart tonight goes out to them and goes out to them with powerful compassion, with warm love, love and compassion that would still have them home, would welcome them home despite everything that has been.

[33 : 02] And that's in our text as well this evening. Verse 13 might not be obvious to you but a literal translation of the verse from the Hebrew says, as a man, any of you know Hebrew it's Ish, as a man whom his mother comforts so I will comfort you.

So the picture in one sense is about a mother comforting an adult child. She's already done it for him years ago. But now she's doing it for the adult child.

And some of you here will know what that is like. My older brother died some 14 years ago now. He suffered sadly from an alcohol addiction for probably the second half of his life.

And those of you who have an individual like that in your homes, or have an individual like that in your homes, in your family, will know the chaos that that brings. Or if they're affected by drugs somewhat similarly.

And it brought a lot of chaos into my family, particularly to my mother who in most of that time was already a widow.

[34 : 25] there's all the lies, and the minor pilfering that goes on, and all of these things sometimes displays of violence that nobody sees outside.

They might see some of the bruises, and so on. That amongst much that was good as well. But my mum kept on having him back.

She never turned him away at the door. Always the door was always open for him to come back. Why?

Because she was a mother. And she did the kind of thing that is spoken of here. She had the compassion in her heart. She had the warm love that was open to receive back that child of hers. An adult child. A child who ought to have known better in his adulthood. but she was ready to take him back and did take him back again and again and again.

[35 : 30] Why did she do that? You know why? You know why you've done it? I know in some cases it comes to the point where you're no longer physically able to do it or mentally able to cope.

But all the times that you've done it, you do it because of what is said in Genesis chapter 1 you are made in the image of God. Of the God who is like that and has his back as adult children as well. Thank God that it's not just children that he saves or teenagers that he saves or people in their middle age that he saves. But he saves those who have spent the whole of their life away, running away from the father and the father's heart is pumping with eternal compassion and pity and his pity is going out, the arms of his mercy and pity are going out and saying can you not see what I am like and will you not come to me?

And of course they won't come. But his heart goes out and he empowers them to turn as an adult child whom his mother comfort hurts.

So I will comfort you. Am I speaking to a prodigal tonight? Prodigal son, a prodigal daughter, you might actually know from your own experience what it's like for your mother or your father, someone else in your home to have you back despite the chaos that you might have brought into that family.

[37 : 14] Well think about the heavenly father. Think about what he says here about his comfort. Our parents can come to the stage where just in their frailty, their physical frailty, their mental frailty, they can no longer cope with us.

But God is not like that. We were singing in Psalm 27, for my father and my mother have forsaken me. But not the eternal father, the Lord will take me up.

And that's really what the whole of the second half of the book of Isaiah is all about. It's a message of comfort for Israel. Comfort, comfort my people.

In Old Testament times, Israel is of course the son of God. Right from Exodus chapter 4 that we see that in the first place. God calls on Moses to go to Pharaoh and ask for the release of Israel.

What he says is, Moses, go and tell them, Israel is my firstborn son. That's the heart of compassion of the father for his son. Go and tell Pharaoh to let them go.

[38 : 33] Israel is my firstborn son. Let my child go. Let my son go. Let my family go so that they might come and worship me. And that's what he's saying tonight to you as well.

He's making that invitation to you to come. That you can worship him. That's the good news for us still this evening.

God's love. Heavenly father comforts his children with motherly tenderness, with motherly compassion, with motherly care, with motherly love.

And he breaks the power of the greatest power on earth. That's what he did for Israel in the Old Testament. The power of Pharaoh. he was the great power at that time.

And this abject slave people who were powerless got out of Egypt one night. How did that ever happen?

[39 : 40] Because the father was there working for the redemption of his people. They hadn't the power to get out of Egypt themselves.

You haven't got the power to get out of your bondage to sin. To sin. But there is one who has the power to get you out from under the power of Satan.

There was one who had victory over Satan at the very cross of Christ. He displayed his victory openly in the moment of that victorious call.

And when the forces of evil thought that he was done and they had done their work and the people could never have been set free. Jesus cried in one sense they thought in weakness from the cross it's finished.

My life's over. It's done. No, that was a cry of victory. The battle was over. Or the great warfare was over. It's finished. Done it.

[40 : 49] They're free. They're free. They're free. free. He sets us free and he takes us home.

And he welcomes us home as one whom his mother comforts or as a mother comforts her child, even another child.

so says God, I will comfort you. Is it not time for someone here to come home tonight?

To come home to the Father? Is it time for you? Is it time for you? God, I will go to you?

I will go to you. I will you. He's been chasing you for a long, long time. Around every corner.

[41 : 54] He's gone everywhere you've run. And he's still there. But he's there in love. Far greater than any mother or any father on the face of this earth.

he's there in his pity. He's there in his compassion. He's there in his love. He's there in his readiness to forgive. And in his power to forgive. And he's saying to you, come home.

Like the father in the parable, he's not only waiting for you to come home. He's not just the waiting father. From the very beginning, of course, he's been much more than that.

He's the seeking father. Genesis chapter 3, God came looking for Adam. Adam, where are you?

Not that he didn't know where Adam was, but he wanted Adam to know where Adam was.

And he wasn't in the place where he once was, standing before God and speaking to God and in union and communion and fellowship with God. Adam, where are you now?

[43 : 06] He's saying that to you tonight. Where are you? Where are you? He knows where you are. He knows exactly where you are in relationship to himself.

Do you know where you are? Do you know where you're ready to come home? Come, everyone who thirsts.

Isaiah tells us in chapter 55. Come to the water, he who has no money, come, buy. How can you buy without money? Well, in the gospel, under the gospel dispensation, you can buy without money.

Because it's all free, it's free, it's gift, come, buy, and eat, come, buy, wine, and milk, without money, and without price. Seek the Lord while he is to be found, while he's to be found here.

Wherever two or three of his people are together, God is there, the Lord is there. Seek him here, seek him now. The God who is seeking you. Are you coming home to the heavenly Father, to his comfort?

[44 : 13] And finally, he's the God who wipes the fears away. That's part of the wonderful picture that we get of God in the closing chapters of the book of Revelation.

And of course, John in the book of Revelation is actually just, he knows Isaiah well, and he's quoting Isaiah when he talks about Isaiah chapter 25. That's where he takes it from when he talks about, I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. Back in the garden. God with Adam, God with humanity. He will dwell with them and they will be his people. God himself will be with them as their God.

God, it doesn't stop there. He goes on to say, he will wipe every tear from their eyes. I don't know what it's like in your family, but when our kids were growing up, daddy's kisses were okay.

For a minor scrape or something like that. Daddy's kisses could do. Kiss on the knee or a kiss on the grays. But when it came to these big hurts with, you know, the sobs, daddy was no use.

[45 : 36] It had to be mummy. It had to be mummy. Mummy's kisses, mummy's embrace, mummy's comforting, consoling, soothing, cuddles.

What I say, John and Revelation are saying is, that's the kind of God God is. That's the kind of person God is. Old Testament as well as New Testament.

This is what our God is like. Have you come to know him like that? Have you come to experience him like that? Perhaps even now.

As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you. What an encouraging word for us.

Do you know it in your own experience? May God make it real for you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for every revelation of yourself that you give us in Scripture.

[46 : 56] We thank you for the various pictures that you use to help to clarify these things for us, to grab our attention, to hit home to where we are in our experience, in our relationships in life, and above all, in our relationship with you.

And we ask, Father, that by the power of your spirit, you would just speak these words into our hearts here and there, into the hearts of all your people here tonight, just that they may have the assurance that you are the God who is like this, who will comfort us.

But for those who maybe until now have not known you, but who need to know you in this kind of way, Father, we ask that by your spirit you would sow that seed in their hearts and that it might just begin to flourish and open and bud through Christ our Lord.

Amen.