

Living at Peace in our Mother's Arms

4th Sun. after Pent. – 07/06/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Isaiah 66:1-10 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 12, **“For thus says Yahweh: ‘Behold, I will extend peace to her (My Church) 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.’”**

Introduction

✧ Isaiah, the prophet, starts us out in our Old Testament Reading, issuing a command; a directive to all who are God’s holy people. In the Hebrew text it is an imperative, meaning this is not just a suggestion; it’s a non-negotiable. “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her...” (v.10).

➔ So, to whom or what is Isaiah talking about here? The references in this section can get a bit confusing. So let me give you a quick point of reference to clear things up.

➔ “Jerusalem” is not referencing here the city in Israel. In fact, “Jerusalem”, “her”, and later on the “mother” are all references to the same thing; the Church of God. And “you”, the nursing, hip-born, comforted child and the Lord’s “servants” refers to those individual believers who are inside God’s Church.

✧ So Isaiah is directing you; a believer of Yahweh to “rejoice with Jerusalem”; God’s Church – even “you who mourn over her” (v.1).

I. Jerusalem appears to be a ruined city

✧ If you were to go to the city of Jerusalem today, you would find a city of ruins. It is, of course, a modern city with a population of 1 million people. But beneath that city, and in some cases, carefully excavated to allow access for tourists and archaeologists, is layer after layer of ruins.

➔ The 2,000 year-old steps on which Jesus sat and taught His disciples? You can actually walk on them. The tunnel that Hezekiah cut beneath the city to reroute water 700 years earlier? Still there; still accessible. The magnificent stones, some the size of school buses that created a giant foundation for God’s temple? They make up what Jews now call the “Wailing Wall”. You can touch them.

➔ Noticeably absent, however, is any trace of the Temple itself. That building, which Yahweh, the Creator called His own dwelling place, is utterly gone, completely destroyed. King Solomon built the original temple. God occupied it; claiming it as His own with a cloud so thick and dense and real that no priest could enter.

✧ When Isaiah wrote this text, he pictured that temple in his mind. That temple was the center of Isaiah’s universe. God was present there with His people, just as He promised. But today the Temple is not there. Destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans; leaving not one stone upon another; an event mourned to this day by Jews and many others.

➔ Yet, even Isaiah, some 750 years before that destruction, predicted in chapter 64 that the day was coming when Jerusalem and God’s Temple would be no more than ruins (64:10–11). He knows that God’s people who love Jerusalem will one day mourn because of that.

✧ Jesus said it most clearly, gazing wistfully at the city from across the Kedron Valley, knowing that those in God’s Church would soon kill Him just as they did the prophets of old: “Behold, your house is forsaken” (Lk. 13:35). Even then, there were many within God’s Church who were corrupt; who had rejected the God who promised to reside in that Jerusalem Temple. So that

stone structure's days were numbered – certainly a reason to mourn, because God was no longer there.

II. Jerusalem is now a people; God's Church

✧ But Isaiah's message before us today is about so much more than buildings and streets, stones and mortar. Jerusalem, for Isaiah, is first and foremost people; God's people. The greatest reason to mourn for Jerusalem was not about the stone structure, but about what had happened to its people. It wasn't God's choice that made Him remove His presence from The Temple, but the people and their Kings who had turned their backs on God. Manasseh, for example, built altars to idols; to Baals and Asherahs "in the house of Yahweh" "and in Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 33:3-9). Definitely a reason to mourn?

➔ Still Isaiah calls us in verse one to "rejoice with [Jerusalem] in joy." Why? because God gives Isaiah the ability to see, in advance, beyond the walls that were torn down and the stones that were scattered. Not to see a city of ruins, but to see a city; a community of God's people! He sees God dwelling among and within His people regardless of the physical location or building of wood or stone. What Isaiah sees here is the Church; the people in and among whom God dwells.

✧ With the eyes of faith and by the out-pouring of God's Spirit, Isaiah glimpses a new Jerusalem; a very real resurrection from death into new life! A "city"; call it a "Jerusalem" whose inhabitants are spread all around the globe; who do not *have* a temple building because they are the temple of God's Spirit.

➔ And because of this resurrected body of believers where God has once again taken up His pleasure to dwell, it is a reason to rejoice!

✧ What do you see when you see God's Church? It's tempting to picture buildings, even if they have become empty buildings. Cities across this country have skylines pierced by steeples that now are keeping vigil over empty pews or that have been repurposed into coffee shops and trendy event centers.

➔ But, while a church building is certainly nice, the Church of God is not a building. It's not even programs and ministries. The one Holy Christian Church is the Triune God, present among the people He has gathered together in His name around His Word and partaking of His sacraments.

✧ Yet, if we look at those people in God's Church only with human eyes, the view is still not much improved. I mean, right now, as I look at you, I see that these pews are populated with sinners. And that's not just some theological concept; it is a brutal fact of life. Every one of you here has a tongue that does damage; a hand that reaches for a bottle or some other kind of crutch to depend upon instead of God. We all have a temper that flares; eyes that wander where they should not; feet that pursue selfish gain and a neck and chin stretched higher than it should in vain conceit. And in the wake of our sin, we leave very real hurt and harm. We are burdened with doubt and despair that crave after our life's end.

➔ And yes, that's right; as you turn your eyes up here to the pulpit you see that it is occupied by a sinner as well; one who is weak and heavy laden just as you are. If we trust only our human eyes, we see, just as it was in Isaiah's day that among the people of this "Jerusalem" here, God is obscured and there is little more than the ruins of God's Temple.

III. Do you see Jesus present in God's Church?

✧ The thing is though, that Isaiah is not looking with human eyes, but with the eyes of faith: "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her" (v. 10). "Rejoice!" Why? because Isaiah sees the very presence of God!

- ➔ The way he talks here strikes our earthly ears as strange. He describes Jerusalem – God’s Church, as a nursing mother, and then he invites God’s people; he invites you and me, to nurse and be satisfied; to drink deeply and delight; to find comfort like a baby cradled in her mother’s arms.
- ✘ Does that mean Isaiah; well actually that God is calling us all a bunch of babies? Well, yes; He is. But that’s because He knows that for us to view Him as the Creator of all things, now coming into our presence to have an intimate, loving and compassionate relationship is hard for us to wrap our minds around. So He uses an image that every one of us can easily grasp.
- ➔ We’ve all had loving, caring and compassionate mothers. Even if we don’t remember some of the things He describes, we have still seen mothers cradle, nurse, care for and protect their young babies often.
- ✘ So God tells us that He has given us Himself; His very real, physical presence in the body of believers gathered together by His Spirit in His Church. She is the very presence of the God that we insecure, needy, sin-filled, believing babies need for survival. Through her, God literally feeds, nurtures, protects, satisfies, comforts, and delights us. Without what God gives through her, we all die. And just to make sure we adults don’t miss the connection, in verse 13, Isaiah describes us with the Hebrew word not for a child but for a man. He says, “As one [as a “man”] whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.” No matter our human age, we never outgrow our dependence upon our spiritual “mother”, which is God caring for us here, through His Church.
- ➔ We need God, not a temple made with stones, erected on a platform amid the ruins of Jerusalem. We won’t find Him under a steeple in a building that’s been converted to a coffee shop. Golfers won’t find God on the golf course. Shoppers won’t find Him at the mall. Hunters and campers won’t find Him in the woods.
- ✘ He has promised us that He is here; here where people whose tongues have done damage, now use those same tongues to confess their sins with us; and whose ears drink in God’s forgiveness beside us. God is here, where the hand that once depended upon a bottle now reaches for the single sip of blood that satisfies the soul with Christ’s forgiveness of sins. These are the things that give Isaiah a reason for rejoicing.
- ➔ What do you see here in Christ’s Church?
- Do you see a thin wafer of bread or the true body of Christ?
 - Do you see a liturgical routine drawn from a meaningless tradition, or do you see a vibrant conversation with God that has stood the test of time; that is drawn from Scripture as God’s Divine Service to your needy souls?
 - Do you see a pastor just reciting prepared words or a community of believers coming to the Lord in prayer, knowing that He is present and listening?
 - Do you see a place? A building? Or do you see the people, like Isaiah did; the living, breathing Temple of God’s Spirit through whom God is at work day after day and week after week?
 - Do you see white hair and wrinkled skin or a treasured storehouse of the wisdom of God’s Word lived out through experience?
 - Do you see a noisy child or a beloved disciple of Jesus in training?
 - Do you see a requirement that you must fulfill for God one hour each week, or do you see God Himself present in your midst; pouring out the gifts that make your life abundant and eternal?

→ In other words, do you see Jesus here in this place?

IV. Where Jesus is, there is life ... and more!

✘ Because, not only Isaiah, but Jesus promised you and me that He is here. “Where two or three are gathered in My name,” He said in Matthew 18:20, “there am I among them.” Jesus is here in the water and the Word that set you apart as God’s own beloved child in your baptism. Jesus is here, speaking to you in Scripture readings and sermons; teaching you through hymns and liturgy. Jesus is here, listening to your prayers ... every Sunday.

→ But that’s not all. Jesus is here, surrounding you with a community of believers; people whom He has gifted with wisdom and experience and love and grace to share with you. He is here, gifting you with His wisdom and experience and love and grace to share with them. Yes, He has given us each other, to be the vessels through which He gives us Himself. It’s here that Jesus gives us His body; His blood; the forgiveness of sins; the gift of life everlasting. None of those come without Jesus.

✘ And where Jesus is, there is life. It’s no wonder then, that when Isaiah sees the Jerusalem of the future, it is not lifeless stones and ancient ruins. No, he sees a mother sustaining life within her child. A nursing child needs one and only one food. You and I need one and only one Savior, one Lord, to whom we can go and from whom we receive the words and gifts of eternal life.

→ He sustains us as God’s children, year after year, decade after decade, generation after generation, century after century. For two thousand years, the people of God have been fed and sustained for eternal life by meeting Jesus here to receive strength in His body and blood; to find life in His Word and presence.

→ When a child is distressed, he/she finds comfort in the arms of Mom. It’s not by accident that Jesus said, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Lk. 18:17). The very thing that we can never do for ourselves, only Jesus has done for us. In our time of deep distress; in the face of death, it’s the cross of Jesus that gives us the forgiveness of sins. It’s the empty tomb that proclaims Christ’s victory over death, comforts us and grants us hope for eternity.

✘ In verse 11 Isaiah invites us to drink deeply of God’s many graces and gifts and find true delight. And where does he bid us to go for that perfect peace which surpasses all human understanding? To the one place that God said He pours out His unsurpassed and eternal peace; the place where His peace and grace flows without ceasing, “like a river;” like “an overflowing stream” (v.12).

→ To “Jerusalem”; our “mother”; His Church – where God, in His Son, pours out His love and peace; His grace and power; His blessings beyond measure upon us today and every day until He returns to take us to our heavenly Jerusalem forevermore.

→ So, my fellow children of God, “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, ... rejoice with her in joy!” “Drink deeply with delight” for Jesus, your God and Savior ... He is here! Amen.