

**Sermon Text: Isaiah 66:10-14** 10 " Rejoice with Jerusalem, And be glad with her, all you who love her; Rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn for her; 11 That you may feed and be satisfied With the consolation of her bosom, That you may drink deeply and be delighted With the abundance of her glory." 12 For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream. Then you shall feed; On her sides shall you be carried, And be dandled on her knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforts, So I will comfort you; And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." 14 When you see this, your heart shall rejoice, And your bones shall flourish like grass; The hand of the LORD shall be known to His servants, And His indignation to His enemies.

**Sermon Theme: The New Testament Church's Loving Care for Her Spiritual Offspring.**

In the name of our loving elder Brother and Savior, Jesus Christ, dear fellow redeemed; A mother's loving care for her children from early on is greatly welcomed by her offspring. In infancy the hearts of children are made glad by experiencing the feelings of peacefulness, contentment, and security as their mother bears them up in her arms and cares for all their needs. At her bosom they are nursed until satisfied. They are held close to her heart, affectionately caressed and kissed, and spoken to soothingly. To the casual observer it seems as though such little people do not have a care in the world. While babies have their own set of problems to contend with, such as wet or dirty diapers, a hungry tummy or a stomach ache, and the frightening sound of loud noises, still their mother is there to lovingly attend to all their wants and needs. Of all human relations the mother's loving care ranks high on the list for those who have experienced it.

The prophet Isaiah draws from this cherished picture of the human family, as he speaks of yet another kind of relationship that is on an even higher plane, that is a spiritual one. In the verses preceding today's Scripture text, Isaiah prophesied of the spiritual birth of offspring in the New Testament age, which we are even now living in. Their spiritual mother is identified as Zion or Jerusalem, which we know as the Christian Church where the gospel of Christ is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered. In verse 8 Isaiah writes, "For as soon as Zion travailed, she gave birth to her children."

Being born again of water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism, we were added to the family of God, the holy Christian Church. And even as a human mother lovingly watches over, nourishes, comforts, protects, and guides her little ones, so also in a spiritual way the Church does the same for our souls through our use of the gospel in Word and Sacraments.

It is to the spiritual offspring of the Church, namely to all those who love the Christian Church and everything she stands for that the prophet Isaiah addresses the words recorded in our text. His inspired message reveals that as believers in Christ we have every reason to rejoice with joy and gladness, for our spiritual mother the Church gives us spiritual food and drink for our souls that satisfies, consoles, and delights our hearts.

While the overriding message to believers in Christ Jesus in this portion of Isaiah is spiritually upbeat and uplifting, yet in the midst of his message we find the prophet speaking of

the Church's offspring mourning for her. Isaiah foretells in this chapter that when the New Testament Church of believers would be ushered into this world, not everything would be joyful or happy. For as the New Testament Church was being born, there would be those of the Old Covenant Church who would be suffering a fearful demise, because not all of them would believe in the promised Savior Jesus Christ. Believers would mourn, because families would be divided between those who believed in Jesus and those who did not. This mourning would intensify still more with unbelieving family members turning against and persecuting their own flesh and blood for having embraced the Christian faith. The apostle Paul can be heard mourning over his kindred people who rejected Christ, as he writes of them in Romans, "I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites." (9:2-4)

In the Reformation period, the Christian Church experienced the mixed emotions of joy and sadness for the church. Believers in Christ rejoiced over the rediscovered gospel of Christ which had long been shrouded in the church by the false teaching of works righteousness. God's children were glad to feed upon the unadulterated gospel which revealed we are forgiven and saved alone through the redemptive work of Christ and not by anything we say or do in order to gain God's favor.

However, this joy was dampened by the sad news that the external church of that day, which had been known as the mother church, was unwilling to shake off from itself the shackles of its religion of works and embrace the freedom which the gospel of Christ blesses us with.

Down to this day, all those who hold fast to, cherish, and contend for the precious saving truths of God mourn over the external church suffering great spiritual violence at the hands of those who promote faulty beliefs in the name of Christ. We have great concern for the hapless souls who are being fed spiritually destructive false teachings. Examples of tainted spiritual food in the external church are numerous and varied, ranging from a denial of all the Bible being the inspired Word of God, to a rejection of the six day creation account in Genesis, to looking to social trends to determine morality, to a refusal of accepting Jesus' Sacraments as the means of grace through which God offers and gives forgiveness of sins, life and salvation, and even to the extreme case of not acknowledging Jesus as Lord and only Savior of the world.

Like as in the days of the apostles and the Reformation, as we take a stand against the spread and consumption of contaminated spiritual food in the church, we suffer the mournful experience of severing fellowship with family and friends who do not share the same religious conviction. This is never easy or pleasant.

However, all those who hold fast to the truths of Christ are not left comfortless. The Lord declares to His children in today's text, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." When a little child is hurt by some kind of injury or mourns over a painful experience, the mother is quick to pick up her child in her arms to provide comfort and help. So also our gracious God, working through the gospel in Word and Sacrament in His Church supplies us with loving care, assures us of His abiding presence in our lives to comfort, sustain, and strengthen us in mind and spirit.

Concerning this mother-like care, Isaiah says to us, "that you may feed (literally, nurse) and be satisfied with the consolation of her bosom, that you may drink deeply and be delighted with the abundance of her glory." With the bosom of our spiritual mother, the Church, being

full of the pure, unadulterated Word of God, as we drink in deeply of it, receiving it by faith, our spirits are satisfied, comforted, and delighted.

To know that all the Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God is to have the confidence of possessing the absolute Word of divine truths and heavenly wisdom which guide us in life, even unto everlasting life. To know that God created the world by His almighty Word and that He uses His unlimited power to govern the world for our sakes is to be assured of being completely safe and secure in the protective arms of God. To acknowledge and follow the unchanging will of God revealed in the ten commandments is to possess God's standard of morality that serves for our blessing.

The one great divine truth which the prophet Isaiah emphasizes when he speaks of our benefitting from drinking from the bosom of the Church is that of being delighted in the abundance of the glory of the Church. That glory of the Church which the prophet refers to does not consist of ornate buildings or splendid musical instruments or finely crafted furnishings or various church customs that adorn the life of the church. No. The true glory of the Church consists in the glorious teaching of the cross of Christ and all that entails.

The apostle Paul testifies of this very comforting and soul delighting glory of the Church, declaring that Jesus "was delivered up (on the cross) because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (4:25 5:2)

To know by faith that Jesus took our place in suffering the full punishment for all our transgressions and rose again from the dead as our victorious Savior is to possess peace of conscience and peace with God. Concerning the blessed peace that comes from the message of the cross of Christ, the Lord declares in Isaiah, "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river." The peace God imparts to our hearts by blessing us with faith in His gift of forgiveness and eternal salvation through Jesus Christ is like an overflowing river that flows incessantly to give us abundant comfort and joy.

During the course of a toddlers young life there are numerous times that he gets injured or hurt, whether it be a skinned knee, a bee sting, a burn or whatever. Whenever any of this happens, little ones come running to their mother, expecting her to make it better by affectionately holding them, lovingly applying the necessary remedy, and reassuring them with her consoling voice.

How many are the times we have done harm to our souls through our sinfulness and have gone to the gracious Word and Sacrament of the Church and received the soothing, healing balm of the gospel of Christ that declares to us that in Jesus all our sins have been taken away? Yes, even though we are God's imperfect children who often give our heavenly Father reason to be angry with us and disown us as His children, yet on account of Jesus our elder Brother's all atoning sacrifice for us, He is ever ready and willing to accept us back as His dear redeemed children.

Concerning the blessed peace we find in Jesus the hymn writer heralds this song of praise:

Thy works, not mine, O Christ, speak gladness to this heart;

They tell me all is done, they bid my fear depart.  
To whom save Thee, who canst alone for sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?  
Thy wounds, not mine, O Christ, can heal my bruised soul;  
Thy stripes, not mine, contain the balm that makes me whole.  
To whom save Thee, who canst alone for sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy cross, not mine, O Christ, has borne the awe-full load  
Of sins that none could bear but the incarnate God.  
To whom save Thee, who canst alone for sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy death, not mine, O Christ, has paid the ransom due;  
Ten thousand deaths like mine would have been all too few.  
To whom save Thee, who canst alone For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy righteousness, O Christ, alone can cover me;  
No righteousness avails save that which is of Thee.  
To whom save Thee, who canst alone for sin atone, Lord, shall I flee? (LH 380)

Thank God for mothers who lovingly cared for us during the early years of our lives. But greater still by far is the cause of thankfulness to God the Father for His Church, our spiritual mother, which through its use of the gospel in Word and Sacrament we have been made children of God and heirs of heaven. May the Word of Christ proclaimed in our mother Church ever serve to feed and nourish our souls so that we continue to experience peace, comfort, joy, and hope through our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.