

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 23, 2017
Isaiah 66:10-14

In Christ Jesus, who feeds us with His nourishing Word, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The blessing of family is something we sometimes take for granted until something bad happens. We are injured and family gathers around us. We suffer a loss and family members pray with us. We are depressed or discouraged and family members surround us with love, support, compassion and encouragement. How lonely it would be if God had not created families. The same thought can be applied to our spiritual family as children of God. We would not only be lonely, we would be eternally lost apart from the family of God, the Holy Christian Church.

As the prophet Isaiah nears the end of his book, the LORD leads him to describe the New Testament era and the end times. Chapters 63 and 64 contain a prayer for grace and for the deliverance of God's people. In chapters 65 and 66, Isaiah describes the answer to that prayer, the final separation of the faithful from the ungodly.

In the verses just before our text (vs. 7-9), the LORD pictures Zion, the Church, as a mother about to give birth. She will bring forth children with little or no labor pains, which is certainly not the norm for childbirth. In this way the Lord describes the miraculous birth of the New Testament church from the church of the Old Testament. On Pentecost the Lord quickly brought forth a gathering of three thousand believers by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word that was preached by Peter and the disciples. Our sermon text continues that thought of this new born Church. Our theme and first point is this:

WHAT A BLESSING TO BE A CHILD IN GOD'S FAMILY
I: REJOICE IN GOD'S BLESSINGS.

Whenever a baby is born there is rejoicing. Many phone calls and text messages are made to relatives and close friends. Then baby pictures are sent over facebook or e-mail so that all know what a blessed event has taken place. It is no different here. We read verse 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.**

Although there has been good reason to mourn for Jerusalem in the past, since most of Israel had turned away from the LORD JEHOVAH, Isaiah encourages the faithful to rejoice over the newly reborn Jerusalem. Jerusalem, often also referred to as Zion, was the city of God. It was God's chosen location of His temple and the dwelling place of His glory. Jerusalem is also synonymous for God's people as we read in Isaiah 40:1-2 **COMFORT, YES, COMFORT MY PEOPLE! SAYS YOUR GOD. SPEAK COMFORT TO JERUSALEM...** Jerusalem is God's people, His Church. "Daughter of Jerusalem" or also "Daughter of Zion" was another way to describe the believing children of God as Isaiah writes in 62:11 **INDEED THE LORD HAS PROCLAIMED TO THE END OF THE WORLD: "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, SURELY YOUR SALVATION IS COMING; BEHOLD, HIS REWARD IS WITH HIM, AND HIS WORK BEFORE HIM. AND THEY SHALL CALL THEM THE HOLY PEOPLE, THE REDEEMED OF THE LORD; AND YOU SHALL BE CALLED SOUGHT OUT, A CITY NOT FORSAKEN.**

After the coming of Jesus, God's people are described as "Jerusalem." Both the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians and John in his book of Revelation use that term. We are the sons and daughters of Zion by faith in Jesus Christ. He has brought us together to be His people, the New Jerusalem, the city of Zion, the people of God, His Family. And...

WHAT A BLESSING TO BE A CHILD IN GOD'S FAMILY!
LET US REJOICE!

We can rejoice because of all the many blessings God has given us. We read in verse 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...** The pictures used here are so poetically beautiful. The Lord will direct peace to the Church like a mighty river, so that she is well watered, and He will bestow earthly gifts upon her as a rushing stream that overflows its

banks. This peace of course, is not earthly, physical peace, but the spiritual peace we have with God on account of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Jesus declared in John 14:27 **PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU, MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU; NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES DO I GIVE TO YOU. LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED, NEITHER LET IT BE AFRAID.**

We deserved God's anger and condemnation because of our sins, but Jesus went to the cross and all of the animosity and wrath over sin was placed on Him. God poured out His condemning justice upon His Son, so that now we can rest at peace with God. Jesus paid the price for our punishment, now there is everlasting peace with God. When we have that peace, which passes all understanding, let the evil world around us rage and threaten--we have nothing to fear!

What is the **GLORY OF THE GENTILES**? In Isaiah 60 we find that this term means the "wealth of the nations." This includes money and possessions as well as all other talents, powers and abilities that believers bring into the Church. It is all of the respective abilities and talents, offerings and gifts that believers share with the Lord and work within His kingdom. Indeed, we have this in overabundance, we are extremely blessed, like an overflowing stream.

We will come back to this point of rejoicing a little later on. We now get to the second point:

II: DRINK SPIRITUAL MILK.

We read vs. 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.** One very literal translation puts it this way: **SO THAT YOU MAY SUCK TO YOUR FILL AT THE BREASTS OF HER COMFORT.** Another beautiful picture the Lord is drawing for us. Even as a baby nurses at his mother's breasts and receives both nourishment and comfort so also when we drink of God's Word, the spiritual milk of the Lord, we are being fed and nourished, but also being comforted, cared for and encouraged.

Peter uses the same picture in his first Epistle where we read in chapter 2:2 **AS NEWBORN BABES, DESIRE THE PURE MILK OF THE WORD, THAT YOU MAY GROW THEREBY...** When we were first born, in order to grow, we needed milk, for most of us our mother's milk. To grow spiritually, we need spiritual milk, the basic food of life for our souls is the Word of God. The Lord has established the Church to provide that Word for us.

Unfortunately, some Christians conclude that they don't really need this milk anymore. They dismiss the milk of the Word by thinking, "I know all of that stuff," or "It doesn't really meet my needs and doesn't taste that good," or "It's really quite boring food," or "I'll find my own spiritual food that will feed my soul," or "I'm too old for that spiritual baby milk." That kind of thinking would be as foolish as a baby deciding he didn't need milk anymore and then choose to live on eating dirt or sucking on his thumb. How long would he live?

How long would our faith live without the consistent feeding of the milk of God's Word nourishing our soul? Like newborns, we need the basic sustenance of the law and gospel every day. Through it, the Holy Spirit keeps the miracle of faith healthy and growing in our hearts and active in our daily lives.

Not only does our Lord through His Word feed us like a mother nursing her baby, but the Lord comforts and cares for us as well. That is part three:

III: RECEIVE A MOTHER'S COMFORT AND CARE.

We read the second half of vs. 12 **THEN YOU SHALL FEED; ON HER SIDES SHALL YOU BE CARRIED, AND BE DANDLED ON HER KNEES. AS ONE WHOM HIS MOTHER COMFORTS, SO I WILL COMFORT YOU; AND YOU SHALL BE COMFORTED IN JERUSALEM.** What wonderful pictures the Lord has been drawing for us here. How many of us haven't seen the loving mother carrying her child on her hip when he has become too tired to walk anymore. The loving mother bouncing her child on her lap and knees giving him great joy and comfort knowing that his mother cares for him and spends time with him. How many haven't seen the loving mother closely fold her hurt and crying child to her bosom, comforting him in his sorrow or distress. So also is the great comfort and care of the Lord in His Word.

It is interesting to note that the word "**one**" in this passage, "**as ONE whom the mother comforts**" is the Hebrew word "ish" which means "man," not "child." No matter what our ages, the Lord is there to give us the comfort and compassion we need. As believers we are all "children" of

God no matter how old we are. The LORD through Isaiah used this same picture in chapter 49:15-16 where we read: **CAN A WOMAN FORGET HER NURSING CHILD, AND NOT HAVE COMPASSION ON THE SON OF HER WOMB? SURELY THEY MAY FORGET, YET I WILL NOT FORGET YOU. SEE, I HAVE INSCRIBED YOU ON THE PALMS OF MY HANDS...**

Are you comfortless? Are you going through trials and feelings of despair? Are you lonely or depressed? Are you experiencing pain and sickness, or facing upcoming surgery and are you worried or scared? Are you feeling empty and unloved? Are you feeling betrayed? Are you broken-hearted?

Let these words sink deeply into your heart, your mind and your soul. Rarely does a mother ever forget about her child she has nursed or not love him. Yet God says, it is easier for that to happen than for Him ever to forget or to stop loving, comforting and caring for us, His children.

WHAT A BLESSING TO BE A CHILD IN GOD'S FAMILY!

We come back to the point we made earlier: **REJOICE IN GOD'S BLESSINGS**. We read vs. 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**.

When we see all of this happening in our lives--God providing and comforting and feeding us with His powerful Word of grace and mercy in Christ Jesus-- it will bring great joy to our hearts and cause us to grow spiritually. You've heard the phrase about a young child, "He's growing like a weed!" That is what the Lord means when He says, **AND YOUR BONES SHALL FLOURISH LIKE GRASS!** When we receive God's forgiveness in Christ and His blessings of life and salvation, peace and joy, comfort and encouragement in His Word we will spiritually grow as quickly as grass does. That's what regular nourishment and comfort from the Word will do!

THE HAND OF THE LORD being made known, means God acts in history for all to see. His greatest act in history, which changed the course of the world, was of course His sending of His Son into this world as one of us, to live that perfect life of obedient love for us, and to die the sacrificial death we deserved and to rise again thereby conquering sin, death, Satan and hell and assuring all of His children a resurrection to everlasting life. Jesus also ascended on high to rule all things for our eternal welfare and promises us that He will come again to take us to be with Him forever.

Today we still see God's hand in action spreading the message of salvation throughout the world. With miracles and great power He gave birth to the New Testament Church in Jerusalem and now the powerful Gospel message is being preached all around the world.

But the hand of God's wrath will also be shown to and seen by His enemies. This will be fulfilled on Judgment Day, but not only then. Throughout the New Testament era God has deposed one unbelieving ruler and nation after another who have tried to rise up against His Church. Anti-Christian governments and people have come and gone in their attempts to destroy the Church, the believers in Christ. False teachers and false teachings have been raised up by Satan to try to wipe out the truth of God's grace in Christ to mankind and to destroy the Church, but the Holy Christian Church is still here and will continue to prosper until Christ comes again. Then the Church Militant—the Church at war—will become the Church Triumphant—the Church in victory!

There are some serious flaws in this Church, in Jerusalem, in believers. The whole Church on earth is made up of sinners like you and me. We cause problems within the church because of our emotions and feelings, fears and worries. Because of sin, the Church on earth could be called "Jerusalem the Tarnished" instead of "Jerusalem the Golden." We've done our part to tarnish it!

But through Jesus' sacrifice, our sins have been cast into the depths of the sea and we are filled with Christ's righteousness. In God's eyes, through Jesus shed blood and righteousness, we are "Jerusalem the Golden" and He continues to guide and direct His Church so that His people are continually fed and nourished by the spiritual milk of His Word.

OH, WHAT BLESSINGS TO BE A CHILD IN GOD'S FAMILY, NOW AND FOREVER!

Amen.