

Sermon for May 8, 2016 – Mother's Day

Isaiah 66:10-14 (NIV84)

Theme: **Find joy in your mother's arms!**

- 1) *Drink her spiritual milk.*
- 2) *Enjoy the blessing she has to offer*
- 3) *Receive the comfort God gives through her*

¹⁰ *"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. ¹¹ For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance." ¹² For this is what the LORD says: "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. ¹³ As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem." ¹⁴ When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes.*

There are few things more precious to a child than a mother's love. I see it in my own family. When hurt or needing help my kids often pass right by me - looking for Mom. Why? Because, from before they can remember, she has fed, clothed, nurtured and cared for them.

The wonderful relationship God intended earthly mothers to have with their children serves as a good illustration of the relationship God the Father wants Christians to have with the Church. Let us consider these things under the theme: **Find joy in your mother's arms!** 1) *Drink her spiritual milk.* 2) *Enjoy the blessings she has to offer.* 3) *Receive the comfort God gives through her.*

Part One: Drink her Spiritual Milk

Our text begins: *"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her.*

In this verse, the LORD calls believers to be filled with absolute joy and gladness over the Church. "Over the Church?" someone might ask, "Doesn't this verse talk about having joy and gladness over Jerusalem?" True, it does say that. However, it is important to understand is that the Bible often uses Jerusalem as a symbolic name of the Church. Why? Because just as God dwelt in the temple amongst the people of Jerusalem, so God dwells within his Church today.

Why are believers supposed to be bursting with joy in regard to the Church? The next verse explains it:

For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance."

We find joy in the Church because she is our spiritual mother. Now, a mother with a newborn is a wonderful thing to see. A baby cries and nobody but mommy can comfort it. When she comes close, baby reaches out to her in anticipation. Mommy holds baby to her chest - close to her heart. Peace is in the air as baby drinks mommy's nourishing milk that it loves beyond anything else. After baby is done, joy and contentment fills its face. Every bone in baby's body is happy and its face gleams from the love and nourishment it has just received.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are, spiritually speaking, the baby, and the church (Christ's bride) is our mother. She nourishes us with the milk of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The Gospel is the good news that *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* (John 3:16 NIV84) And just as a baby lies close to its mother's heart and feels her love as it drinks her milk, so we lay close to God's heart and experience his love as we gather together around the Gospel.

St. Peter once wrote: *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."* (1 Peter 2:2 NIV84) As milk is for the newborn, so the Gospel is to us. It strengthens our faith, comforts our hearts and keeps us spiritually alive. And yet, even though we know this to be true, how often don't we turn our back on our spiritual mother and refuse to take the milk we so desperately need? We do this by not making worship and Bible study a priority in our lives. And why do we do this? Does a baby refuse the milk its mother offers or nurse only a few times a year? Think of the blessings we miss by not regularly coming to worship and Bible study: things like receiving a deeper knowledge of God, a greater assurance of his forgiveness and a greater appreciation of his love.

Dear Christians, find joy in your mother's arms! Come and drink in the Gospel of God's love for you in Christ, which He offers you through this congregation's ministry. Then your soul will be exceedingly happy and bursting with joy.

Part Two: Enjoy the blessings she has to offer.

For this is what the LORD says: "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; you will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees.

A mother doesn't just show her love by nursing a baby. She also plays with her child, hugs it, and carries it close to her. This is the LORD's will for the Church as well. Through the Church, God gives his children many blessings, the foremost of which is "peace."

The peace that the LORD provides through His Church is different than the peace the world offers. The Hebrew word for peace is "shalom" and it includes the idea of completeness, wholeness, and health. I guess the best way to explain God's shalom is to illustrate it: Have you ever seen a beautiful sunrise over lake Michigan and had a sense of peace fill your heart as you saw the breathtaking colors reflected in the water, heard the slight breaking of the waves and felt the clean brisk air? It's amazing, and yet - for some reason - there was still some emptiness inside of you.

You didn't quite feel complete. Have you ever felt that way: at peace and still empty inside? Well, God's peace fills everything up - including the emptiness worldly peace cannot fill.

The peace the LORD offers through His Church is, first and foremost, the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that, through faith in Jesus, we can stand before Him without fear. The peace God offers through the ministry of His Church is the knowledge that, no matter what trouble comes our way, He is with us. The LORD will deliver us safely through this earthly life to himself in heaven.

But the blessings don't stop there. God also promises the "wealth of the nations," which include all the talents, abilities, and experiences that all the different cultures in the world have to offer. How do we receive the wealth of the nations through the church? Well, take a moment to look around you. What do you see? I'll tell you what I see: a rather diverse group of people with different talents, abilities and experiences from whom I can learn! And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Through faith in Christ we are connected to a much larger network of people from every nation on this earth. The wisdom of Jewish Solomon, the insight of African Augustine, the bold confession of German Luther – their writings are just a few treasures the church possesses and enjoys. Our hymns span culture and time. Their various ways of expressing the hope we have in Christ gives us great comfort, encouragement, joy, and rest in any time of need.

God says that, through his Church, peace will flow like a river and the wealth of the nations like a flooding stream. So, members of Immanuel, look around you once again. Do you see your spiritual mother? Do you see the Church? It's not this building. The people who surround you and confess the same faith you confess is the Church. Find out more about one another. Love each other. Draw from one another's experiences and encourage each other with the Gospel. Work together - not just on Sunday, but everyday. Then you will certainly experience the wealth of the nations. Then you will understand what it means to be carried on your spiritual mother's arms and dandled on her knees.

Part Three: Receive the comfort God gives through her

The LORD says: *As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you;*

The word translated here as "child" is really the word for a full-grown man. A mother never stops loving her child, no matter what age he or she is. And even though that love is great, it pales in comparison to the love and concern God has for us in Christ.

Yes, God has great compassion for you. He loves you so much that he gave up his dearest treasure. How many of you, parents, would be willing to let one of your children die a horrible death to save someone who hates you? But this is what God did for us in Christ. And because He did that, we can be sure that the LORD will continue to show his compassion to us through the ministry of His Church, as our text continues

And you will be comforted over Jerusalem. A more precise translation of this verse is: *"you will be comforted through Jerusalem.* The LORD comforts us *through* the ministry of His Church.

The Gospel in Word and Sacrament, together with the prayers, support and fellowship of all members of this congregation are the tools God uses to help, comfort and encourage us.

And this comfort strengthens us. As we minister to each other and allow others to minister to us we grow together in love - ever appreciating the brother and sisterhood we share in Christ.

When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass.

God certainly blesses us through the Church. He nourishes us with His Word and Sacrament. He gives us each other to strengthen one another, to find eternal friends, and to share His great love. Doesn't knowing all this make you want to shout for joy? Doesn't it make you want to enjoy each other's fellowship all the more?

No, we are not a perfect congregation. Being sinners, we often tarnish the joy God offers through the Church. At the same time, none of our tarnishing can take away the great love God offers us through the Gospel. His grace is infinitely more powerful than our sins could ever be.

The LORD has made Immanuel — not the building, but the fellowship of believers that gathers here — your spiritual mother, and he will continue to show love to you through this church as long as it stands. **Find joy, then, in your mother's arms!** Come and drink her spiritual milk! Come and enjoy all the blessings she offers you! Come and receive the awesome comfort God offers through her. Amen