

Sermon for May 14, 2023 – Mother’s Day/Easter 5

Isaiah 66:10-14 (NIV84)

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

- 1) Drink her spiritual milk.
- 2) Enjoy the blessings she offers.
- 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.

Few things are more precious to a child than a mother’s love. I see it in my own family. To this day, when my kids are hurt or need help, they usually call Mom, not me. Why? Because, from before they can remember, she has fed, clothed, nurtured, and cared for them.

The wonderful relationship that God intended earthly mothers to have with their children serves as a good illustration of the spiritual bond God the Father wants Christians to have with the Church. Let us consider that relationship under the theme: **Find joy in your mother’s arms!** 1) *Drink her spiritual milk.* 2) *Enjoy the blessings she offers.* 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.*

The LORD calls believers to be glad about the Church. “The Church?” someone might ask, “Doesn’t this verse talk about having joy and gladness over Jerusalem?” True, it does say that, but it is important to understand that the Bible often uses the name “Jerusalem” symbolically for the Church. Why? Because just as God dwelt in the temple amongst his people in Jerusalem, He promises to live within his Church today, as Jesus once said: *“Where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am among them.”ⁱ*

Why does God want believers bursting with joy regarding 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 through whom our heavenly Father cares for us for Jesus' sake. Now, a human mother's interaction with a newborn is a beautiful thing to behold. The baby cries, and nobody but mommy can comfort it. When she comes close, the baby reaches out to her in anticipation. Mommy holds the newborn to her chest - close to her heart. Peace is in the air as it drinks mommy's nourishing milk that it loves beyond anything else. After the baby is done, joy and contentment fill its face. Every bone in the baby's body is happy, and its face gleams with love over the care 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 good news that *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*ⁱⁱ And just as a baby lies close to its mother's heart and feels her love as it drinks her milk, we lie close to God's heart and experience his love as we gather around the Gospel.

The apostle Peter once wrote: *"Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of the word so that by it you may grow up with the result being salvation."*ⁱⁱⁱ As milk is for the newborn, so the Gospel is for 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 that? Does a baby refuse the milk its mother offers or nurses 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 more profound knowledge of God, greater assurance of his forgiveness and 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 offers.

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 it, God gives his children many blessings, the foremost of which is "peace."

The peace that the LORD provides through His Church differs from the world's. The Hebrew word for peace is "shalom" and includes the idea of completeness, wholeness, and health. I guess the best way to explain God's shalom is to illustrate it.

One of the most memorable places I have ever visited was Moraine Lake in Banff National Park – before the tour buses arrived. I still remember the white-top mountain grandeur reflecting in the still mystic blue waters while a thin mist hovered near the shore during the early “golden hour” of sunlight. Best of all, there was practically no one around. I only heard the sounds of nature – like a loon call in the distance. As amazingly serene as that sight was, I still felt an emptiness inside of me. I 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 that the most beautiful worldly peace cannot fill, as the church father Augustine once prayed: “*You have stirred in us the desire to praise you, for you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it comes to rest in you.*”^{iv}

The peace the LORD offers through His Church is, first and foremost, the peace of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that we can stand before Him without fear through faith in Jesus. It is also the peace of knowing that He is with us no matter what trouble comes our way. 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 includes 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. Who do you see? A 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 more extensive network of people from every nation on this earth. The wisdom of Jewish Solomon, the insight of African Augustine, the Gospel understanding of German Luther, and the bold confession of Chinese Christians in the face of persecution are just a few treasures the church possesses and enjoys. Our hymns span time and culture. Their various ways of expressing our hope in Christ give us great comfort, encouragement, and joy 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, brothers and sisters in Christ, look around you 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 every day. Then you will undoubtedly experience the wealth of the nations. Then you will understand what it means to be carried in 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 the word for a full-grown man. A good mother never stops loving her child, no matter their age. And even though a mother's love is great, it pales in comparison to God's love and concern 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 His Church's ministry, as our text continues:

And you will be comforted over Jerusalem. This verse could also be translated: "*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, 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 indeed 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 rejoice? Doesn't it make you want to enjoy each other's fellowship even more?

"But pastor, not everything is sunshine and rainbows in our congregation," someone might protest. "I have been deeply hurt by what another member has said or done. I don't feel I receive the support I need. No one seems to notice me," or "I need some space, and members keep bothering me." I could go on and on about the complaints people have lodged against the church throughout my ministry. Here's the thing to realize: because the church is composed of sinners on this side of glory, there will always be sin. And just as no human mother is perfect, the visible church is not perfect. It may say or do things that hurt us.

That being said the, person working through the Church is her perfect husband: Jesus. He not only forgives our sins but hers as well. Through her imperfections, he loves us with a perfect love that forgives all our sins, pays for our guilt, and washes away our shame. And with his forgiving love, he empowers us to forgive each other in the Church.^v He moves us to see one another as he sees us – willing to bear each other's burdens as Jesus bore ours.^{vi}

The LORD has made the fellowship of believers that gather here at Divine Word your spiritual mother, through whose Gospel ministry He has and will continue to show love to you. **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 incredible comfort God offers through her in the Gospel. Amen

ⁱ Matthew 18:21 EHV

ⁱⁱ John 3:16 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Peter 2:2 EHV

^{iv} Augustine's Confessions 1.1

^v Cf. Ephesians 4:32

^{vi} Cf. Galatians 6:2