

Isaiah 66:10-14 *"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.*

Rejoice in the Blessings from God's Church

1. We can't be indifferent about the Church
2. Look at how much we get from the Church
3. Rejoice in these blessings

What is your favorite food? Each of us might have a different favorite food. Each of us have different and individual tastes. For example, I love sauerkraut. The sourer the better. Connie, on the other hand, can't stand even the smell of it. Go figure. I was proud of my granddaughter, Alex, last week. We had the girls at our house for a week and one night at the table I asked her if she liked sauerkraut. She didn't know because she never tried it. I asked her if she wanted to try it and she did. Just a tiny bite. She didn't like it. But she tried it. I was proud of her for that.

The Apostle Peter said, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:3) We have tasted that the Lord is good so we should be craving his spiritual food. That food he gives us through the Church. We should want what he feeds us through the Church because great spiritual blessings come to us through the Church. Isaiah encourages us to rejoice in the blessings that come from God's Church.

Isaiah wrote, *"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her.* Jerusalem is prophetic code word for the Church. Isaiah speaks to those who mourn over what they see happening to the Church. We can't be indifferent to what is happening to the Church.

God's Church is constantly being threatened. In Isaiah's time the Church was threatened by the Philistines, Assyrians and then the Babylonians. Isaiah had to deal with false prophets who threatened the Church. Later, threats would come to the Church from Persia, Greece and Rome. False teachers, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees would almost destroy the Church. After the time of Jesus, the Church would be threatened by persecution and more false teachings. There never was a period of time when the Church wasn't threatened by this world.

God's Church today is still struggling. A recent online article, that I don't believe is fake news, said that less than 20% of Americans attend church on a regular basis. It also said that church attendance is steadily declining and mid-sized churches are especially being affected. It's not just the numbers either. The influence of the Church on society is at an all-time low in America. Living together outside of marriage, gay marriage, disrespect of authorities, abortion – things which were condemned by the Church for years are now commonplace in our culture.

In addition, the Church is under attack from the outside. A recent Christianity Today article said, "For the third year in a row, the modern persecution of Christians worldwide has hit another record high. But the primary cause, Islamic extremism, now has a rival: ethnic nationalism." We are experiencing that more and more in America as Christian teachings are coming under attack. We can't be indifferent to what is happening to the Church.

Jesus gave his life for the Church. He bled and suffered for the Church. He went through hell for the Church. And the Church is not an institution; it's you and me and everyone whom the Holy Spirit has brought to faith in Jesus. We can't be indifferent to what is happening to the Church.

We opened worship today with a prayer. We sang, "I love your kingdom, Lord, The place of your abode, The Church our blest Redeemer saved With his own precious blood. For them my tears shall fall; For them my prayers ascend; For them my cares and toils be giv'n till toils and cares shall end." May that hymn be our constant prayer. May we love God's Church, pray for God's Church, mourn over the threats to God's Church and work to build up God's Church.

Because look at how much we get from God through the Church. 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.* Peace – that elusive condition which we always hear so much about. Peace between nations. Peace between races. Peace between political parties. Peace in families. Treaties are signed to guarantee peace. Counseling sessions are held to restore peace.

And yet, as we all realize, wars still break out, politicians still squabble, families feud, and tensions develop with the neighbor. On our own we will never have peace. Only God can give us peace. He gives us peace that only a child resting on his mother's hip can truly appreciate. He gives us peace that nothing else in the world can give us. Through the Church, God gives us peace that flows like a river. Peace that runs, pure and red in the blood he shed for us on the cross. Peace that we could not win, but that he won freely for us with his own death and sacrifice. The peace that God gives is a peace that we will experience fully and completely when he returns and takes us to be with him.

Of course, if we have peace, we have a lot more in this world. We're able to be content in this life. We're able to face the future without fear, without being troubled and worried about what tomorrow might bring.

In addition to peace, through the Church God gives us wealth. *"I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream.* Through the Church, God nourishes us with glorious abundance by filling us with his Holy Spirit in baptism, from the altar of the Lord's Supper, with his very God-breathed word. We are satisfied in ways that no huge home, or nice care, or big paycheck could ever satisfy. We have the Word that gives life and hope for eternity.

Along with peace and wealth, God gives us comfort. Many people spend a great deal of time and effort in trying to make their lives more comfortable. Through the Church God doesn't promise us earthly comfort. The Church's mission is never to make believers feel more comfortable, but rather to make them feel comforted, like a mother comforts her children. ¹³ *As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.*

We call God our heavenly Father, and rightly so, because Jesus taught us to pray with those words. But in our text today Isaiah pictures God like a mother who comforts us. You see how mothers love and care for their children. They sacrifice and suffer for their children. Mothers comfort their children when they hurt. That is a good picture of how God loves and comforts us. He comforts us through the Church with Word and sacrament, confession and forgiveness.

And like a mother he is protective of his children. *The hand of the Lord will be made known to his servants, but his fury will be shown to his foes.* As children of God, we often experience pain and troubles. We question God's wisdom, but God will never forsake us. Even when we don't understand what is happening to us, we can experience the comfort of God working for us. God does not cause the bad things to happen, but God can work through our circumstances to bring about good, to strengthen us, to bring us closer to other people and to God and to prepare us for service.

For all of these blessings – peace, comfort protection – Isaiah tells us to rejoice in God's Church. *"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her . . . When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass.* Yes, we mourn over the threats to the Church today, but let us rejoice that God's Church continues to satisfy us with the blessings of salvation. Let us rejoice in the blessings from God's Church.