

## **“Mothering Comfort in Jerusalem”**

Liturgical Date: Pentecost 4 (Proper 9 C)

Primary Text: Isaiah 66:10-14

### Intro:

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, is the Old Testament Lesson from Isaiah 66. The title of today’s sermon is “Mothering Comfort in Jerusalem” as GOD SPEAKS WORDS OF COMFORT TO ISRAEL SO THAT THEY WILL KNOW THAT DESPITE THE COMING JUDGMENT HE PROMISES A TIME OF VICTORY, PEACE, AND REJOICING.

This portion of the final chapter of Isaiah is rich in Gospel. There are many examples of God’s promises to His people in these last few chapters of Isaiah. They look forward to restoration of Jerusalem, and ultimately the New Jerusalem that is the eternal home of God’s people. Parallels can be drawn to the new heaven and earth, that New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21 and 22.

### Page 1:

We actually have to work a little bit to mine out the Law here. The text does speak in verse 14 of “indignation against his enemies”, reflecting the judgment of God against those that would oppose him. But even this is a piece of good news to the people of Judah because it tells them that their enemies will ultimately be defeated. However, if we look at verse 10 as it says “all you that mourn over her” this eludes to the fears of those in Judah at the time. Because all is not well, the people are worried and in need of

comfort. We begin to understand why when we look at the context of what is going on.

Isaiah, as with the other prophets of God, had a tough mission. He was to boldly speak the Word of the Lord to people who often did not hear what he had to say. As we heard a couple of weeks ago, he had called out their false holiness and hypocrisy. The people had not been faithful to YHWH—they kept the temple system going but also appealed to false gods and adopted many of their practices. Isaiah had faithfully warned Judah that they were frail and weak, because of their spiritual adultery. But, largely, the warnings of Isaiah and the prophets would go unheeded. The Lord is patient, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, but there is a time of reckoning that will come.

By this point, the northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen, about 40 years prior, in 722 BC. Judah, which contained the Holy City of Jerusalem, was still holding on. But they were under intense pressure from Assyria and Babylon. And of course, they would continue in the wickedness that the Lord had warned them to stop. They would fall themselves in 586 BC and many would be carried off into exile. So this has not happened yet at the time Isaiah speaks these words, but it is coming.

#### Page 2:

Jerusalem is one of the great cities of the world today. So we know that its coming destruction was not permanent. It is great not because of its large population as with 900,000 people it is pretty big, but not huge. It is not great because it is a center of international trade or finance. It is not great because of it being a transportation hub. Yet, about 3 million tourists visit Jerusalem every year! Why? Because it is a holy city. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims it is an important place. Have any of you ever

visited Jerusalem and the Holy Land? I haven't but I sure would like to one day.

But with three religions claiming it as a holy place, you can imagine that there has been conflict. Throughout history many empires, nations, and groups of people have controlled the city including Romans, Muslims, Christian Crusaders, the British, and Palestinians. This has involved a great deal of bloodshed for this "city of peace". And there is still violence that flares up to this day.

Since the Six Day War of 1967, Jerusalem has been controlled by the modern-day nation of Israel. But that it should be part of Israel has been disputed, especially by Muslims. Much of this centers around the fact that Muslims built the Dome of the Rock mosque (the third holiest site in Islam) right on top of where the Jewish temple once stood. Recently, with the U.S. moving our embassy to Jerusalem (which we had promised to do for decades), tensions flared again. There have been attempts to establish a lasting peace, but it has never held. History teaches us that when more than one group claims the same piece of land, conflict and death often occur. So this joy and peace and flourishing that God spoke of through Israel has still not fully arrived. But GOD SPEAKS WORDS OF COMFORT TO ISRAEL SO THAT THEY WILL KNOW THAT DESPITE THE COMING JUDGMENT HE PROMISES A TIME OF VICTORY, PEACE, AND REJOICING.

Page 3:

But even though much hardship and suffering was ahead for the Jews that heard Isaiah's words in Chapter 66 and even though much conflict would occur over Jerusalem in coming centuries, as I noted at the beginning of the sermon this text is primarily good news-Gospel. "*Rejoice with*

*Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy”* our text began. There is comfort coming! Comfort that only the Lord can deliver.

And notice the imagery that God uses to describe this. It is as close of a comfort that one can imagine. The imagery of a loving mother, feeding and comforting her child. Verse 11, *“that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance”* and from the second part of verse 12 through verse 13, *“and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”*

You all know if you have raised children-fathers too-but especially mothers know the power of a mother to comfort. And in this I believe we see a reflection of the care that God has for us. A baby is helpless to survive on its own. It does not understand adult schedules or responsibilities. But it knows that it is hungry and a baby quickly learns where their needs can be met. In fact, research has shown that one of the worst things that happen for a child is that it does not bond with a caregiver through loving touch. We are also helpless without God. We need him, as we need our mothers.

Many of you have been there. 3 A.M and that sound of “wah, wah, wah” rings out. Baby is not happy. Baby is most likely hungry. Now some dads get up to give a baby a bottle, but that is the minority. It generally is Mom that provides the milk-often in a very intimate way from her breast to the distressed baby. The baby drinks deeply and he or she is satisfied and delighted. A mother carries her baby, for nine months in the womb, and then for years after. A happy baby bounces on her knees with delight. It’s quite a sight to see, is it not? And this is the imagery that God provides to

His people to comfort them: *“As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”*

And even as we grow older and don't need bottles and diaper changes. Even as we can articulate more what is ailing and troubling us, our mothers are still there. Sometimes it is only Mom that can make it alright. And God uses this simile because He feeds us, He cares for us. Spiritually, our consoling breast is the Word of God. It only can truly satisfy the soul.

And we also see Gospel imagery in terms of a river in verse 12, *“For thus says the Lord: Behold I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream.”* Jesus is the Prince of Peace and the Living Water. Think of the nature of a river. A river is active, moving. Even a peaceful, meandering river is not stagnant. Rivers are ongoing, they are strong, they endure. They continually bring new water. In the waters of Baptism, we have been made a child of God. And that living water keeps flowing in our daily Christian lives.

#### Page 4:

A comforting and consoling mother. A moving and living river. This is good stuff! Because the Gospel is good stuff, great stuff indeed. These are things the Jews of ancient Jerusalem needed to hear. They are things that we need to hear. Jerusalem would fall and the Jews would be exiled. But God in His mercy would allow them to return and rebuild the temple. Jerusalem would be theirs again!

But many have, and continue to make the mistake, of focusing only on the physical Jerusalem. As we looked at earlier, the control of Jerusalem has changed hands many times. It would be restored with Ezra and Nehemiah. But then the Romans would occupy Israel. Then they would destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. The Jews would be dispersed. Muslims

and colonial powers would then control the city and not until 1967 would Jews once again gain control. But is this the end of battle for the political control of Jerusalem? Only time will tell.

As with many Biblical prophecies, there is a “now and not yet” aspect in our text from Isaiah. Because the true Gospel promise here for us is that the Jerusalem in which we will truly be glad, have joy, and rejoice in is not the physical Jerusalem that stands today. Jesus would die and rise again in Jerusalem for the sins of the world. He would ascend to the Father and has promised to return. As the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:2, *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* GOD SPEAKS WORDS OF COMFORT TO ISRAEL SO THAT THEY WILL KNOW THAT DESPITE THE COMING JUDGMENT HE PROMISES A TIME OF VICTORY, PEACE, AND REJOICING.

In these last few chapters of Isaiah, God speaks through His prophet of a coming Jerusalem—one that is not built by human hands. It is the New Jerusalem, a heavenly city far superior to any earthly construction of Jerusalem that has existed or exists currently. This is the Jerusalem of which Revelation 21:3 says, *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God.”*

And we who have faith in Jesus, who are the children of God, will see it. In the grace and mercy of God He has prepared it for us. It is more comforting even than the most peaceful river or best mother. Verse 14 says, *“You shall see”*. Did you hear that? You shall see. And in seeing it, the Bible tells us that *“your heart shall rejoice, your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the Lord shall be known to his servants.”* The hand

of the Lord is powerful. It is active. It is comforting. And it is at work today. We look forward to our eternal home in the New Jerusalem. In this we declare with the Psalmist from Psalm 66:1-2, *“Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!”*

Amen.