

July 28, 2019 (Pentecost 7 C)

Isaiah 66:10-14

“Ecclesiastical Patriotism”

I’m looking out at a group of very patriotic people here today – and I have no doubt you love your country and you thank God for the abundance of blessings and freedoms you enjoy in this great land. Because of that, I’m guessing you **don’t like it** . . . when people insult America, and point out all her flaws, and say this country never *was* great, and claim it’s racist and imperialistic, and is taking advantage of people – and needs to PAY for all her supposed wickedness. We get angry and upset with people like that, and we might just remind them of another wonderful freedom we have in this country: if you don’t like it, you’re free to leave.

Oh . . . you don’t need a lesson in patriotism today; I’m confident of that. There *is* a lesson, however, that we *do* need to consider from the prophet **Isaiah**. It’s a lesson in what I’d like to call: *ecclesiastical patriotism*. That is: patriotism for the Church – the Kingdom of God that He brought us into through the Blood of Jesus and the waters of Holy Baptism. He welcomed us – people who once were His enemies and who hated all that was good and right – and made us citizens of heaven and part of a Kingdom that stretches across the globe and down through all of history. He paid the price of our immigration in full and granted it to us as a gift, received by faith.

The question is – *how much “patriotism” do we feel toward the Church He has placed us in?* God tells us today, directly through the pen of **Isaiah** – exactly how we should feel about the Church – referred to as “Jerusalem” here in these verses:

Isaiah 66:10–14 (CSB)

10 Be glad for Jerusalem and rejoice over her, all who love her. Rejoice greatly with her, all who mourn over her—11 so that you may nurse and be satisfied from her comforting breast and drink deeply and delight yourselves from her glorious breasts.

12 For this is what the LORD says: I will make peace flow to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flood; you will nurse and be carried on her hip and bounced on her lap. 13 As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you, and you will be comforted in Jerusalem.

14 You will see, you will rejoice, and you will flourish like grass; then the LORD’s power will be revealed to his servants, but he will show his wrath against his enemies.

People criticize, deride, and ridicule God’s Church all the time – *how do we feel about that?* In Old Testament times they point out all the bloodshed and say God was a cruel tyrant and responsible for hate crimes, homophobia, xenophobia, and genocide. In New Testament times they’re quick to point out all the abuses, the hypocrisy, the warts and the blemishes of the Church – and they say it’s caused more damage than good in the world.

We *should* be frustrated by that – *it’s simply not true!* We should be able to point out all the good, saving, and glorious things God has been doing in Old and New Testament times – even in the darkest of days and through very imperfect people. Wherever the Church has flourished, culture has flourished and improved dramatically. The enemies have always raged against the Lord and His people – but they will one day experience His wrath (as our text reminds us).

Bring it closer to home . . . *how do we feel about the little branch of the Church where He has planted us – our synod and our congregation here?* Is it not easier for us to see the FLAWS – as opposed to the blessings? We lament the shrinking numbers in our synod and the tight budgets all over the place. We get frustrated with the decisions and the priorities of our home and world mission boards. We cringe as tuition at our synodical schools keeps getting higher and higher.

On a congregational level there’s plenty to complain about as well. We don’t have many children / young families / kids in Sunday School. Many of our people live far away, and that presents a problem. There’s so much work to do and so many ideas we have – but it seems there’s never enough money, volunteers, and those who are serving a lot can get worn out, or frustrated with their fellow members, or disappointed by the seeming lack of results. So . . . we hang our heads and wonder what the future is going to hold.

Do you think the LORD and His servant Isaiah might be upset and angry with us – for such an attitude? *“What’s wrong with you people?!* *How could you possibly complain?!”* And . . . they’re right. We have that **“Jerusalem”** our text talks about – RIGHT HERE! The pure milk of the Gospel is dispensed right here! We all

tasted of it when God said (through His called servant) that your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You've received His blessing upon you, and you will again very shortly here this morning. Christ touches us personally and directly with His Body and Blood in the Sacrament you are about to receive – you can't put a price tag on that! We are digesting the nourishment of His Word (that we've been digging through since Bible class) right now! Peace like a river flows down over us in His gracious promises – where He cradles us in His lap and we are comforted, protected, and safe in His Almighty Arms.

Yes – the problems and struggles are still there – but they are SO overshadowed by the JOY we have as citizens of His Kingdom. We see that truth right here in this text. In that first verse you see, **“all (you) who mourn over her.”** *Why is THAT there?* Well . . . there's a lot of pain connected with the Kingdom of God (here in this world) too.

- There's the pain that Christ endured on the cross – the pain we feel on Good Friday as we see what it cost for God to open His borders to sinners like us. It's pain we know that we caused our Savior and it hurts us to consider it.
- There's pain caused by those who reject Christ and refuse the forgiveness and salvation He came to bring. Jesus wept over Jerusalem as He felt this pain – and we feel it too when our loved ones want nothing to do with Him.
- There's the ongoing pain of repentance we feel in our own hearts and lives. Cutting out sinful attitudes and desires is not easy. Tearing ourselves away from selfish and hurtful words and ways is no easy task. Openly and honestly admitting our guilt and bringing it to the cross can be sheer torture at times.
- Then there's the pain of the crosses we must bear as followers of Christ. We can suffer unjustly – for merely trying to say and do what God wants us to, which can get us in serious trouble at times. Words that people throw at us can be painful at times. Our service to God and our congregation can be a heavy burden as well. Throw on top of that all the physical, mental and emotional pain we feel as sinful people living in a sinful world – where time gradually takes everything away from us.

- There's the pain we feel over souls who fall away from the Lord, and over the problems, divisions, and struggles found all over God's Church on this side of glory.
- And, then there's the coming pain of Judgment – when we will see as Isaiah describes: **“The fury of God that will fall upon His foes.”** That's why the book of Revelation says, **“All the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him.”** (*Revelation 1:7*). On that Great and Dreadful Day when He shows up as King and Judge. We all know people who, sadly, may be on the wrong side of the fence on that Day . . . and then . . . it'll be too late for them.

Things are challenging and difficult in God's Kingdom on this side of glory – they always have been and they always will be. But . . . the **JOY** of what we have and receive in God's Kingdom and here in God's House – just simply overwhelms all that. THAT is what God wants us to remember and to experience here in this lesson. The ***ecclesiastical patriotism*** / the LOVE for God's Kingdom / the JOY of all that we are and receive from Him – shines out like a beacon into a dark world of souls who don't know anything about it. True – some will continue to hate it and lash out against His Kingdom . . . but some will be intrigued and curious about it. And we will get opportunities to tell them how blessed we are to be citizens of heaven and how wonderful it is to be fed and nourished in His “mini Jerusalem” – right here. As for the work of actually bringing His enemies out of Satan's clutches and into His country – well, God Himself takes care of the immigration work and all the costs associated with it.

When we pray in the Lord's Prayer: **“Your Kingdom come”** we're praying that more and more of His enemies would become His servants. We're praying for the privilege of being involved in that work. And, we're praying for that Great Day of Judgment when His Kingdom will be the only Kingdom on this planet . . . and we're closer to that today, than we've ever been before!