

Sermon Draft

Text: Isaiah 66:10–14

Sermon: “Rejoice, God has a Plan”

Even God’s people can lose their way. Like children leaving home in rebellion, we soon find ourselves hungry and thirsty. This attempt at adult independence has only reinforced our real status as infants needing milk, or as Israel in the wilderness needing water.

At the time of Isaiah, God’s people had lost their way. What was even worse is that many of them thought things couldn’t be better: times were good, and they even offered God gifts of sacrifice so many that it became a show of who could offer the most. But hearts were not humble, and even the kings thought they were above the ways and means of the true King.

At least King Hezekiah attempted some reform, but it was not to last. His son, yet another male heir, quickly turned anything good that his father had done into yet more idolatry and vain sacrifice.

So, God had to bring his justice. Sin must be dealt with, punished. Isaiah warned the people, but they did not have ears to hear. There would be destruction, even of the very temple they had trusted as a symbol of God's presence and favor.

First the Assyrians all but destroyed Jerusalem, and then the Babylonians did. Most of the people of Judah were taken into exile, humbled and humiliated by the Babylonians, humbled and humiliated by their own sin.

Yes, we, too, often feel as though we are living in darkness. The world around us offers light all too often flashy but false light and the kingdom of God seems to be in exile. Sometimes we fall for the falsehoods, and we think we are doing just fine, when the reality is that we are still enemies of God, on the wrong side. Addiction and the false narrative I'm not hurting anyone convince us that it's okay to live a certain way or be involved in a certain behavior or style of life.

So why doesn't God do something about this mess? Where is the power of God? Where is our hope and salvation? Is there any hope for the future?

God has a better plan than the ways, means and plans of this world, even among us his people. Yes, he must punish sin. Yes, we must know the consequences. But feeling some of the darkness only helps us appreciate the light.

For God's plan has a future and a hope. To the folks in Isaiah's day, the prophet proclaims that it will come suddenly, when we are, yes, waiting for it to happen and yet not quite expecting it.

He describes the birth of a son in extraordinary terms, as though the child is born without labor pains: ***“Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.***

Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?” (66:7–8).

Isaiah's folks may have thought about this child as a princely son, an heir to the kingdom, an extension of the dynasty. But we know about the final and ultimate royal Son of the house of David, who was both David's son and David's Lord. We know how this played out, in the birth of Jesus. And the very same story takes us to the death of Jesus, because, yes, God in his justice must deal with sin: our sin and the sins of all the world.

And then God raised him from the dead; after the death of our sins comes new life with Christ. This is the new creation Isaiah spoke about in our Old Testament Reading back on the festival of that glorious resurrection, on Easter, the new creation already come in Christ. And Christ will come again.

But if Christ has come, died, and risen, why does it feel like we are still waiting for God to act? During the Second Sunday of Advent, we heard the prophet Malachi say that he would come "suddenly," and he has. Christ has died. Christ has risen!

But why is the world still a mess, and why are we as God's people in the kingdom of God still living in hope and expectation?

Well, today Isaiah reminds us to rejoice! ***“Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her”*** (v 10). Rejoice in that hope. Rejoice in the plan of the God who made it all. Rejoice in our redemption in Christ. Rejoice that Christ has come, that Christ has died, that Christ is risen, and that Christ will come again.

But still we languish. We want peace, stability, and security in our lives, relationships, and planning for the future, but the world can't deliver. We want peace, but we see unrest. We want security, but we only have more metal detectors. We seek the waters and bread of life, but we still get hungry, thirsty, not just physically but in our life with Christ, in our life as God's people.

Well, friends in Christ, Isaiah tells us this very day that God will provide for us: ***“You shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees”*** (v 12).

Like newborn babes, we receive from God the comfort as from mother's milk. Not just in the future, when Christ comes again, but even now, as he feeds us with refreshing food, not just bread and wine but his very presence in and into our lives.

He comforts us with a way of life, with his plan of life, with an understanding of what's really going on all around us, even with the nations in turmoil, even with so many seeming to be enemies of God.

Like a crying baby is fed and like a restless child is bounced on mother's knee, so our God comforts us. We are, indeed, children of God, and he says, ***“as one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you”*** (v 13).

“Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream” (v 12). In Isaiah's world, water was scarce.

Of course, the same water that was needed for life could become a destructive flood, and Isaiah had even used that imagery to describe how God's enemies, whom his people trusted all too easily, could come like a destructive flood.

But now it is God's peace, God's shalom that comes like a river. And his enemies will come like a flood, not to destroy but to become part of the people of God. Imagine that: a flood of folks looking for the peace of God! and finding it here.

That was us, those enemies and outsiders, far off from the kingdom of God, whether we think about it or not. Maybe you have come to Christ, longing, searching, for peace. Maybe you've grown up within the household of faith, like ancient Israel, and sometimes we take it all for granted. But remember that we are those outsiders, Gentiles, who have brought, yes, even the "wealth of the nations" to the kingdom of God.

And what a difference it makes! Our text begins with the “suddenness” and even unexpectedness of God’s presence, even among those who are expecting it! But the context is the contrast between the faithful remnant, those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and those who remain enemies and outsiders.

The text concludes with the reminder that there remain those who are enemies of God, outside the peace of his kingdom, and that the consequences are severe and eternal.

So, yes, we rejoice in the comfort of our God, won for us by Christ’s death and resurrection. God’s Care for His Children, through His extra-ordinary Son, provides for us even as we wait for the New Creation to come fully when Christ comes again.

Yes, we know that there will be struggle and discomfort all over the fallen world in which we live. But we rejoice in a God who comforts us, as a mother comforts her child.

And yes, we know that God's grace and peace and comfort is for all. And that peace that flows like a river has come among us; Christ lives in you, with you, and, whether young or old, we go forth as the children of God like a river of Christ's peace into the world out there!

Amen