

“Rejoicing with Jerusalem”

For centuries Jerusalem has been a holy site for the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths – but even with all its spirituality – it has been a place of much turmoil. Many battles and controversies have surrounded Jerusalem – and it always seem like it’s teetering on the edge of an all-out war.

Not all that much has changed since the days of Isaiah the prophet. In those days the kingdom had already been divided – the Assyrians had captured the northern kingdom of Israel – and the southern kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, lived under a constant treat.

The Lord had spared Jerusalem in previous attacks – but it was only a matter of time before she would fall. Isaiah prophesied that she would fall because of her sinful rebellion against the Lord, and her stubborn impenitence. So, the outlook was pretty bleak for those living in Jerusalem – and it seemed like there was nothing left to do but mourn her death.

In the Bible, Jerusalem is not only a historical city – but also a symbol of the Church – a way of speaking of ALL God’s people. The Lord, through His servant Isaiah, has painted a picture for us of His Church. Having heard these words, it is time for us to rejoice ... or mourn?

From our perspective it’s hard not to mourn for the Church today – because it appears that her days are numbered. It seems unlikely she will survive these days – being attacked from the outside, and decaying on the inside. Her demise only seems to be a matter of time.

Like Jerusalem in Isaiah’s day, the Church today faces sociological, cultural and political threats. God’s design for the family has been broken – to the point that His design is the exception rather than the norm.

For almost 50 years it has been legal to kill little children in the womb. Homosexuality is commonly accepted. Addictions to drugs and pornography is rampant. And children are pressured to figure out if they want to be boys or girls.

But these are things that threaten ALL of mankind. The Church has her own, additional battles to wage. The Battle for the Bible has been lost for most Christians and holding to the Scriptural truths is scorned by many who are called Christians.

Spirituality abounds – but it is a tailor-made spirituality where you design your own religion. The one true God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is just one of many ways to be saved – and everyone has their own beliefs, and are convinced they are going to heaven.

Listen to the Christian preachers out there and see if you hear anything about sin and death – OR – of Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the world. I can't tell you how many times members come back from worshipping in other churches and are surprised by what they hear (and don't hear).

But don't get the impression that the problem is with those OTHER Christians out there – no, we in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod have plenty of problems as well. Adhering to a Scriptural, confessional and liturgical Christianity is not a given – and everyone seems to do what is best in their own eyes.

This morning the Apostle Paul admonishes US to go to those who are caught in their transgressions so that we might restore them “in a spirit of gentleness” – but how often have we, individually, failed in this regard?

On the one hand, we overlook the sins of others because we love ourselves more than our brothers and sisters in Christ. We may say that we don't want to hurt them – but in truth, we are either lazy, indifferent, or we don't want to do the hard work of helping them to see the danger of their sin.

On the other hand, we may take note of the sins of others – not so that we can HELP them out of the trap of their sin – but so that we can use their sin against them. We hold it over their heads in order to make them slaves to our will. We throw it in their faces to exalt ourselves in our eyes.

The last thing we do is exactly what God has given us to do – and that is to lead them to Christ and His forgiveness – to free them from their bondage to sin, guilt, and the fear of everlasting punishment.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, from where we sit, the future doesn't look too bright for Jerusalem. From our perspective, the Church is tottering and it's time to mourn her loss. But Isaiah sings a different tune this morning. "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her."

Even though the Church of God is continually surrounded by enemies – SHE will not fall – because THEY have already been defeated in the death of Jesus Christ.

Satan and all his evil hordes have been cast down. No longer can they stand before God and accuse you of the sins you have committed – not because you have NOT committed any sins – but because Jesus stands at your side and continually reminds the Father – "I have shed my blood for him ... I have forgiven all her sins."

That doesn't mean your enemies will give up trying to destroy you. They will continue to snarl and bark like vicious dogs – but all the bite has been taken out of them through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

To you the Lord promises: "Behold, I will extend peace to [you] like a river." That river of peace is the blood and water that pours from the side of your crucified Savior Jesus Christ – who has been pierced for all your transgressions – who has taken your place in death, and been raised to life again, so that you may live eternally. It is the peace that comes from God forgiving all your sins.

Therefore, in these tumultuous days, let us continue to be nourished and sustained by the peace of God – the forgiveness of all our sin – in which we stand today, and tomorrow and for all eternity, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.