

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have the passage in Isaiah, which is a little bit of a strange one. It talks about nursing from the breast of Jerusalem and the joy of that satisfaction of the glorious abundance that we get. What do we get from Jerusalem? Why would we rejoice and why would we be blessed in the city of Jerusalem? What comforts us? What brings us comfort? So Isaiah here in chapter 66, this is the continuation of his suffering servant concept, which starts way back in chapter 52. And so the suffering servant is about Jesus Christ. Of course, Isaiah is the one that says, "By his stripes, we will be healed. And the iniquity of us all was placed upon him." All this comes from Isaiah. So when he talks about rejoicing in Jerusalem and the blessings that we receive from Jerusalem, it's not the city itself. And it's not even the temple that was there when Isaiah was there, because Isaiah is of course preaching towards the end of Israel. The Babylonian captivity is going to happen and everything like this.

So there's a lot of questions, and Jerusalem is the symbol of the hope of the people when they are in the Babylonian captivity. When they're taken away, their hope is that they might return to the place where the temple dwells, where they might receive the blessings of God wants more and offer sacrifices to that God in Jerusalem. But it's not the temple that is really their hope. Their hope really is the presence of God and the person of God, and ultimately the person of Jesus Christ. And ultimately the hope that comes, the comfort that we receive comes from the fact that we as God's children have been bought by the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which took place in Jerusalem. See, Isaiah is wanting the people to focus upon the promise of God, the promise that he will send, as he said all the way back in Genesis, that one whose heel will be bruised but who will crush the head of Satan.

And so in that word, we are comforted as infants are comforted by their mother, bounced upon her knee and held in her arms. No infant has any fear when they're in their mother's arms, and that is what we are called to recognize, that in Christ we have nothing to fear because in Christ we have been baptized into his death. The old Adam that is within us, our sinful nature, has been drowned in the waters of baptism, crucified on the cross, you might say. Our sin was taken by Christ on the cross and nailed there so that we when we are baptized might receive the benefit of that crucifixion and be raised to new life in Christ. A new creature redeemed by God, holy and blameless in his eyes. And that is truly what we are. And so that image of being comforted and receiving the blessings from our mother is to be the same concept of being comforted by our God and Savior through his death and resurrection as we are made children, infants, you might say, in the family of God.

And yet as infants, we are called to bear one another's burdens, to walk together in this life that God has given to us. And so we are called as brothers and sisters in Christ to go forth and to share all good things with those in need. To be generous in our lives, to sow the seeds of faith, the seeds of the spirit, to sow in the spirit rather than in the flesh. What does that mean? It means that we as Christians, and particularly as pastors, but as Christians as well, we are called to proclaim the word of God in all that we say and do. We are called to be missionaries, to go forth into the world. As Jesus sent out the 72 in our gospel message, we also are called to go out into the world and to bear one another's burdens, to share with those who are in need, to comfort those who need comfort. And also to give to the shepherd that which he is due, to provide for the livelihood of the one who shares the gospel with you.

In other words, part of our responsibility as Christians is to ensure that our pastor is paid for his work. The worker deserves his wages. Now, it's kind of uncomfortable to sit up here and say, "You guys need to give money to the church so that I can get paid." But that's the reality. But that's not really the point. It is the reality. And I do get paid from the tithes and offerings of this church. And it is important because we desire for the ministry of the gospel to continue to be proclaimed from this pulpit. Whether it's me or the person that follows me or the person that was before me, we desire that God's word would be proclaimed in its truth and purity. In order to do that, they need to be able to live. And so it is important for us, and Scripture makes it very clear that is our responsibility. To provide for ministers and preachers of the word.

And not just this congregation, but the entire church missionaries and other people, our synod, our seminaries. We are called to support them and support this ministry. But it's more than that. See, by doing that, by giving of our tithes, of our first fruits, we are declaring that we trust God to take care of us. Now it's saying that we pay our mortgage, we pay our rent, we buy food, we take care of the needs that we have, but we are also called to take care of the spiritual things in life. To care for our brothers and sisters who are in need. To provide for the ministry of the church. All of these things we are called to do because we are making a statement and an act of faith by doing that. We are declaring that we trust God, that in our baptisms he made us his children. And because we are God's children, he will provide for us even as we give a portion of what he has given to us back to him. We trust that with the rest of it he will provide for us.

And even when we are struggling and in difficult times, we still walk in faith knowing that he will provide. I mean, if you look at the [inaudible 00:07:51], "the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky proclaims his handiwork. And day by day it pours out speech and night after night it reveals knowledge." God created the

entire universe for one purpose, that we might see and declare his glory, that we might see the mighty act of God. If this same God who created the universe and set the stars into the sky and the sun to warm us by night, that nobody escapes the heat of the sun. Unfortunately sometimes, but the sun is always upon us providing for us. If this God who has created all of this for our benefit and for his glory, if this God says, "I will protect you and I will keep you safe and nothing will harm you," then we are called to believe those words and to trust him. So that we don't hold onto our treasures, but we share them with those in need.

It's an act of trust that God will provide. Even if we are like sheep sent into the midst of wolves, which is indeed what we are in this world. But here, let's look at the gospel and see what Jesus, what is going on here. This is a continuation of last week, where the disciples were walking around and one village did not acknowledge Jesus. And so James and John wanted to throw down thunder and brimstone upon that village and Jesus said, "No." He's setting his eyes to Jerusalem. For what purpose? To suffer and die so that the words of Isaiah might be fulfilled, that we might be nourished by Jerusalem, by what happened in Jerusalem, that we might be strengthened and comforted by that. So he sends out the 72 to prepare people, to go into the villages and to proclaim that the Kingdom of God is at hand, it is near.

And they go out and they come back rejoicing. "Even the demons listen to us." And Jesus says, "Behold, I've given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the powers of the enemy and nothing shall hurt you." But wait a second, didn't earlier he say He's going to send us as sheep into the wolves? Have you ever thought about what happens when a sheep goes amongst wolves? It's not a peaceful experience. There's a little bit of harm that seems to be done there. And yet he says, "nothing shall hurt you." What in the world are we to make of all of this? "In this world, you will have trouble," Jesus says very clearly, "But I have overcome the world." So what happens? We will face this world. Does he mean that nothing will hurt us? That once we understand and once we have faith in Christ that we're going to be healthy, wealthy and wise and nothing is ever going to harm us again?

I think most of us know the reality. That's not the case. Our lives can sometimes become more difficult when we are faithful to the word of God. Our lives can sometimes become more challenging when we seek to live a life according to God's word. But the words are still true. Nothing can hurt us. Now, we may face trials and persecutions and sufferings.

In fact, the first Christians, these 72 that followed after the 12, they were part of that first line of ministry, the first pastors that went into the world. They, very few of them, survived to a natural death. A lot of them were crucified or drawn and

quartered or burned in the stake or thrown in the lions. And yet Jesus says, "Nothing will hurt you?" Well, in fact, nothing did hurt them, for eternity at least. If you think about it. Christ was always concerned about our eternal lives. In the here and the now, sometimes we will have pain and sorrow. But it will not hurt us. In other words, it will not destroy our faith. It will not destroy the promises of God. It will not destroy the comfort that we get from the peace of God that is still ours and nothing can take that away.

And ultimately, even if we are thrown to the lions or crucified, it's not permanent. It's a temporary pain and suffering, but it will not hurt us for eternity. We will be free and we will be healed. That is a guarantee. And so when Jesus is telling the disciples, "Nothing can hurt you," what he's saying is nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Nothing can take you out of his hands. You are that child, protected by your father. And that father will defend you for all eternity, will forgive you when you fail to live up to his standards, will love you in all circumstances, and will provide you with all that you need to support this body in life. Even if that life is shortened by persecution and disease and whatever else may come. Because it's not just this life, it's life everlasting.

So we are called as his children, baptized and saved, to trust him enough not to be worried about where our next paycheck is going to come from or where these are going to come from, but God will provide. To trust us that even when we face this terminal disease, that we are his children, baptized and saved, and therefore he will take us to be with him. When we are persecuted and mocked, to trust that he will provide. When we share all good things with one another, and therefore have less than what we thought we needed, he will provide as a loving Father cares for his children. We are called to remember this and to walk in faith.

And yes, the demons have no authority over us. And yes, we have authority over all things. But let's not focus upon that, but rather focus that our names are written in the Book of Life in Heaven itself. And that what we do is bringing an opportunity for others to hear that they too are loved by God, that they too can be his child. That he desires for them to receive the benefits of our baptism so that they might know the comfort of a loving father. And so therefore we take our time, our money, our energy, our thoughts, and we apply it to the eternal things. How can we serve God today with this person in this situation so that they might know how much they are loved and forgiven and cherished by our heavenly Father?

That is what we are called to do. And that cannot be stopped by the wolves of this world or anything else, but we do that because we thank him. Because he has already done it for us. And so our baptismal life is a life of thanksgiving, and we thank God by giving to the church and other people who are in need. We thank

God by serving those who are less fortunate. We thank God by helping our neighbor, by loving our neighbor, by inviting our neighbor, by sharing with them.

Do you know there was a study done about why people come to church and they talked about sending out flyers and putting things in newspaper ads and even having the pastor come and talk to them. Nothing was so effective as a friend inviting them to come to church. That was the most effective means of bringing someone to church and having them become a member, is inviting them. You inviting somebody is more effective than me going to them, inviting them. It's not about having all the right answers. It's about the relationship and the care and the love. Everybody knows the pastor has to, that's his job whether he likes you or not. That's what he's supposed to do. But you, on the other hand, it's also your job. People just don't know it.

And so they know and they see and they hear and they feel the caring that you have for them. And then when they get in the church, it continues. We love the visitors and we care for them and we show that we love them. And it's all fine and good that I go and talk to them because of course it's my job. But you, the everyday individual is effective because it's not your job, it's your opportunity. It's your opportunity to thank God for what he has done by sharing with those around you. That is what God is calling us to do. That is what he is telling us, that we are called to be the hand and the feet of the gospel.

We're called to be the sheep that go out into the wolves. And trust that even as sheep, God is going to protect us, and he's going to bring us together. And even out there in the wilderness, we are in his loving arms. And we are safe, and we are secure, because our God will never leave us and he will never forsake us. This is the same God that created the heavens and the earth. He can do and does do what he says he is going to do. You can trust him.

Now may the grace and mercy and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be and abide with you always, now and forever more, under life everlasting. Amen.