

Sermon 1616

Isaiah 25.6-9

October 29, 2017

Mountain top experiences aren't what they used to be. I always thought a mountain top experience was where you had exerted much time and effort to achieve something, and once you climbed that mountain and arrived at the top, once you completed that project successfully, you would be beside yourself with the beauty of the moment or struck by some hard-fought insight.

Mountain top experiences today aren't what they used to be. A number of years ago—I had my first cell phone—I hiked up to the very top of Cathedral Rock, 11,919 feet above sea level. When I got there and looked over the valley, I thought, “Hey, I can get cell reception here!”

Today I ask you to resist that temptation to make the mountain top ordinary. Today I ask you to walk with me as we follow Isaiah and hear him out.

On This Mountain

1. In the holy, Christian Church God receives joyful praise (9).
2. In the holy, Christian Church God works salvation (6-8).

In order to understand Isaiah's words, we have to remember that Isaiah was writing poetry. In poetry, much is communicated through images and pictures. Such is the case with our text. “On this mountain,” Isaiah begins, referring to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was built on a mountain ridge. The ridge wasn't all that high by our standards, about 2500 feet above sea level, but that height meant a lot more if you travelled on foot, like the people of Isaiah's day did. And on the north end of Jerusalem was a little rise, the highest point in the city. That's where the Temple stood. Solomon had built it 200 years before Isaiah. King Herod would expand it in the days of Jesus. That Temple represented God's presence among his people. Priests offered the daily sacrifices for the nation in the Temple. People came to Jerusalem to offer their personal sacrifices to the Lord. The greatest teachers conducted their Bible classes in the Temple. That mountain in Jerusalem, they called it Zion, was the center of God's church on earth.

Understand that and we understand Isaiah's words. Isaiah uses that Temple, that mountain, as a symbol, a picture, of something far greater. The mountain is God's holy, Christian Church.

In this holy, Christian Church God receives joyful praise.

“In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation (9).’”

Only in the Church does the Lord--and the name Isaiah uses for God in this verse is God's special name which our translation renders LORD, the God who promises forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through the Promised Savior (think of Jesus, Beautiful Savior, the Good Shepherd)—only in the holy, Christian Church does the Lord receive the praise that is due his name.

This is not to say people don't give the divine praise elsewhere. Nature lovers praise a God who created such a beautiful world (unless they believe in evolution and the big bang, but maybe they'll grudgingly admit an Intelligent Designer was somehow behind it). The judge and lawyer may praise a heavenly Lawgiver who sets forth moral laws for man to live by. The humanist may praise the divine as a code word for all that is good and noble about mankind's higher nature which draws us together as one. Any non-Christian religion will praise an idol who demands works as the entrance price to Paradise or Nirvana. But only in the holy, Christian Church does God receive true praise, the praise he desires, the joyful praise from sinners who have received his free gift of salvation through faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ.

You and I give our Lord the praise of faith. "We trusted in him and he saved us." This is not to say we've always trusted him. Ever since our earliest days we've looked for other ways out of the messes we made. Lies, blaming others, pretending nothing was amiss. You know what I am talking about. In each and every circumstance we were actually looking for a different Savior, us! Let's not belabor the point. If we didn't think we were sinners, my preaching would have driven you away long ago. Why go to a place where you are unjustly and regularly insulted?

But here we are, sinners every one of us and that makes the praise we give our Lord even sweeter. We didn't deserve the Lord's rescue. It wasn't a small favor we had to pull from him. A neighbor might lend you his car in an emergency, but who would willingly give you his son to put to death? Every day from the first day we became believers to this very day we are sitting in the pew we rejoice in God's salvation. We are glad with the lot in life he has given us. He promised us grace and every blessing. Jesus said to seek the kingdom of God first and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you as well.

I don't want to make this a Thanksgiving Day sermon, but the Lord has been so, so good to us. It puts a spring even in my beat up step when I see a beautiful life unfolding before me every morning. Surely the Lord's mercies are new every day. So is the praise we give him on this mountain, in this holy, Christian Church.

But let's look more closely at the reason God receives joyful praise in this holy, Christian Church. On This Mountain. In the holy, Christian Church God works salvation.

"On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines (6)."

A feast, a banquet with the best of everything, that's what the Lord is offering in his holy, Christian Church. The words poet Isaiah employs makes our mouths water. The finest steak houses on the Strip would hang their heads in shame because

they couldn't get the cuts of meat the Lord is serving. The antique treasures of wine are out of the price range of the wine steward for his ritzy place in the casino. This feast isn't just for the millionaire jetting in from New York to see his hockey team get beat at the T-Mobile. It isn't just for the Oscar winning actor to let loose on day two of his Las Vegas celebration. It is for all peoples, for all faces. This banquet is a charity event. The one offering this banquet isn't gathering money from the diners to give to someone else. The diners are the charity case. The meal is given free of charge to them!

That feast is the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation our Lord offers us. By faith we claim that reservation as our own. By faith the Holy Spirit escorts us to our place at the banquet table as the meal arrives, course after luscious course.

Now this feast seems so wonderful, some have said it can only be ours in heaven. That is insulting to the Lord who is putting on this feast. This is a feast that is ours, yours, mine, today and every day in the holy, Christian Church where God works salvation.

Jesus was in Jerusalem one time for a great feast. He got up in front of the crowds and said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink (John 7.37)." He is not talking about the people dying and going to heaven. He's talking about believing in him right here, right now in the holy, Christian Church. Or when he told the woman at the well, "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst (John 4.14)." He's not telling the woman she's about to leave this world. He is encouraging her to believe in him. And who can forget Jesus' words, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty (John 6.35)." Believing in Jesus feasts upon the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation that Jesus came to win.

But foolish me. Why am I wasting your time flapping my lips proving this when I could have as well gone to Isaiah's next words? Isaiah describes anew this feast in a different way.

"On this mountain he will destroy
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces;
he will remove the disgrace of his people from the earth.
The Lord has spoken (7-8)."

On this mountain death will be destroyed. Death is not only a shroud that hangs over the aged. It is a shroud that hangs over every aspect of our lives. Why buckle up our young in their seatbelts if there is no danger they could be killed in a car accident? Why warn healthy, youthful adults not to drive through flooded roadways if there is no danger they could be swept away and drowned? Why put lions and

tigers behind bars in zoos if the visitors up to a certain age were immune to dying? Death is the funeral sheet that hangs over every aspect of our life. It is what we fear. It is what we take precautions against.

On this mountain death was swallowed up in victory. On this mountain our Lord Jesus Christ hung from the cross and worked out our salvation. On this mountain he shed his holy, precious blood and gave up his sinless and innocent life as a ransom for you and for me and for all the peoples. On this mountain Jesus took away the disgrace of sin by paying the debt that sin incurred for us all. That isn't going to happen at the end of the world. That isn't going to happen just before we enter heaven. It happened already when Jesus hung on the cross. It is ours now. Death is swallowed up in victory. Whoever believes in Jesus will live, and never die. They will never experience that spiritual death of separation from God on earth in time and in hell for eternity. Isaiah speaks about it in the future, simply because he was writing in 725 B.C., seven hundred and twenty-five years before Christ.

On this mountain, in this holy, Christian Church all these blessings are yours and are mine. And this humble, little gathering of brothers and sisters in the faith, this Green Valley Evangelical Lutheran Congregation, is a part of that holy, Christian Church, a branch office, if you will, of that holy, Christian Church. And all the blessings available in that holy, Christian Church are available here, right now, for you, for me, for all, just as they were to those gatherings at Wittenberg and Magdeburg, Wuerttemberg, Anhalt and Augsburg 500 years ago. That's why we love this church so. That's why we sacrifice so much for her.

On this mountain. On this mountain, the hungry hunger no more. On this mountain those who thirst are thirsty no more. On this mountain the lame become swift. On this mountain the mute will speak. On this mountain the deaf will hear. On this mountain the blind will see. On this mountain the timid become brave. On this mountain the weak become strong. On this mountain transgressors are forgiven. On this mountain sinners become saints.

On this mountain I will stand and on this mountain I will die. On this mountain I will enter heaven.

Will you come with me to this mountain? Will you come with me to this mountain?

Will you climb this mountain with me? Will you climb this mountain with me?

Will you stand with me on this mountain? As God lives, I will stand with you. On this mountain the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. On this mountain he daily and freely forgives sins to me and all believers

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And on this mountain he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

The Lord has spoken it.