

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Year C – August 29, 2010 – Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Based on Hebrews 12:18-24 - written by Pastor Paul Horn

**“You Have Come to Mount Zion”**

- I. Having been sprinkled with the blood of Christ**
- II. And with your names written in heaven**

*<sup>18</sup> You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; <sup>19</sup> to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, <sup>20</sup> because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.” <sup>21</sup> The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”*

*<sup>22</sup> But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup> to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, <sup>24</sup> to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

This weekend Vietnam veterans were honored throughout Hardin County. It’s been 35 years since the war ended and some today still carry grief and pain over what they went through. *The Turrett* ran a story about a Soldier by the name of Roger Criner whose recon unit was involved in ground fire with the Viet Cong. His platoon leader called in an air strike from Cobra gunship helicopters, but the helicopters came in from the opposite direction, resulting in Criner and his platoon receiving friendly fire. One of Criner’s fellow Soldiers, Bernard Wilcox, was severely wounded in the head by shrapnel. Criner went to see Wilcox a week later in the hospital. The physician said Wilcox would never walk, talk and see again. A few months later Criner received a letter from Wilcox’s sister. Sgt. Wilcox was able to walk, speak and had vision in one eye. Although that story has somewhat of a happy ending, this experience still brings feelings of grief to Col. Criner. Soldiers in combat, 35 years removed, still have mental, psychological, spiritual mountains to climb.

This morning, the author of the Hebrews takes us to two mountains that affect us emotionally and spiritually. At both mountains God offers a promise; one mountain promises to put to death those who do not follow his commandments; the other mountain promises life, with nothing required from us. You’ve already come to one of those mountains... let’s listen to what the Holy Spirit says to us this morning as he speaks through the author to the Hebrews.

Have you ever seen something so terrifying you had to turn away? As we near the anniversary of 9-11-2001, images of that tragic event still haunt some folks. Perhaps you’ve witnessed a horrific accident and had to turn away. The smells and sights and sounds of combat still make you turn your memory away from that experience. Or maybe something as simple as having your blood drawn made you faint.

The people of Israel saw a scene that caused them to shake in their sandals. A month after their departure from Egypt, the Israelites approached the tallest mountain in the Sinai

Peninsula which stands 7497ft into the sky, Mount Sinai. After the 2million people encamped around that mountain, Moses called them to stand before the mountain. When they did, the earth began to quake beneath feet. In the distance, they heard the sound of a trumpet blast growing louder and louder and louder. They saw a thick black, smoke that billowed from the mountain and covered the peak so that they could not see it anymore. They a blazing fire that appeared to consume the mountain. They heard the trumpet blast grow louder still, and thunder and a voice spoke from the mountain, a voice so terrifying the people pleaded with Moses, "Tell God not to talk to us anymore! You speak to us or we will die, we're scared!" Moses himself shook with fear. Everyone who witnessed the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai was awed by the supernatural demonstration of God's power and holiness.

The author to the Hebrews describes this well known scene to his readers who were Jews who had converted to Christianity. The Christians to whom he was writing were being persecuted for their belief in Jesus. And they were thinking very seriously about returning to that old mountain, back to Judaism, to the thunder, the trumpet blasts, the billowing black smoke, to the old covenant, which offers no pardon for sin-troubled hearts, no peace for sin-torn consciences. All the old covenant did was provide God's wrath for those who do not obey his commandments. The author was asking his readers, "Is this the mountain you want to return to?" He pleaded with them not to trade temporary ease for the eternal blessings they had in Christ.

You might be thinking, "What does this have to do with me today? I am not being outwardly persecuted by the state. I have no need to fear arrest or punishment or death because I walked through the doors of 549 N Wilson Rd this morning. I do not have to consider switching faiths in order not to be persecuted."

It has everything to do with you and me today. You and I have walked to Mount Calvary and stood beneath the cross and have witnessed what Christ accomplished for us there, but yet, in a way, we still like to run back to Mount Sinai. Misled by Satan we are easily sucked into the mindset that we still need to be doing something to earn Gods' favor. Even though Christ lived a holy life for us, our own sinful pride convinces us that we still need to live a good enough life so that we earn the right to walk through heaven's pearly gates. Our sinful nature so thoroughly corrupts us and Satan's powers are working so hard among us that we still slide into this idea that Mount Sinai is better than that hill outside of Jerusalem.

Now it is true that Scripture instructs us as Christians to shine like stars in this dark world. And that's one of the reasons we as Christians swim against the current of sinful society, so that others take notice and ask us about our faith. But oftentimes Satan and our sinful pride convince us to do something that is utterly foolish and sinful. We think that by being such good Christians we are somehow better than others, that we are even better than other Christians. Are we trying to prove this to God, or ourselves or others that we are exemplary Christians?

And it's so easy to slip into this mindset, especially when we compare our behavior with other Christians not behaving like Christians. Take an individual who may have an irritable temper.

One of us may observe an outburst of anger and think, "What a hypocrite!" What we may not know is that individual might have gone home, closed the door to their room, fell on their knees in repentance asking God for forgiveness and strength not to fall into that sin they so struggle with. Then who has become the hypocrite? We have! We've judged ourselves by comparing our actions with that of other Christians rather than judging our actions against God's laws.

I do not find peace for my conscience through my obedience to God's commandments. I stand at the foot of Mount Sinai and tremble in fear for in the commandments I only hear God's condemnation of my actions and words, because they do not match up to his standards. I hear the trumpet blast of judgment, the thunder of God's anger, the darkness and gloom of his threats of punishment.

As a Christian, who knows and believes that Jesus is my Savior, I still struggle daily with my sinful pride, who is always with me, trying to convince me that I still need to do something to contribute to the salvation of my soul and approval of the Almighty God. And that is why I am here today... and that is why you are here this morning... to listen to these words from the author to the Hebrews. **You have not come to Mount Sinai, but you have already come to Mount Zion.**

*Zion* was the name of one of the mountains on which Jerusalem had been built. Here, it the name *Zion* is used to describe heaven, the dwelling place of God Most High. **You have come to Mount Zion.** The author speaks as if you have already stepped foot through the gate to heaven. But there is no free access to the Father's throne, no free pass with the Judge of all, no rejoicing with the angels, no fellow believers, no mercy in judgment, no hope beyond the grave without coming to another mountain, a hill outside of Jerusalem, Mount Calvary, Golgotha, the Place of the Skull. At this mountain we witness another frightening scene; God's Son spit upon, flogged, beaten and crucified by people he had created. God's Son rejected by his own Father, crying out for mercy, but there is none for him, because the anger of Mount Sinai burns against the God-Man because of our sins of sinful-pride, for our false piety, because of our self-righteousness, for our hypocritical living.

And the author says that there on that mountain, Christ's blood was spilt for sinners such as you and me.

The dusty ground swallowed up the sprinkling of Jesus' blood as it dripped out of his body and ran down the wood of the cross. **Blood that is better than Abel's**, the author says, because Abel's blood cries out to God for vengeance against his brother Cain who murdered him. Christ's blood cries out to his Father for peace and pardon, not for himself, but for you. Christ's blood that sprinkled the ground cries out to the Father for forgiveness and eternal life, not for himself, but for you. This blood that sprinkled the ground at Calvary turns God's wrath away from humankind and places it upon Jesus. This blood takes us away from the mountain at Sinai where we only see terror and condemnation. This blood brings us to Mount Zion, God's holy mountain, the new Jerusalem, heaven.

Through the sprinkling of water, the blood of Jesus was sprinkled on you, blood that washed your sins away, blood that has made you perfect and sinless in the eyes of his Father, blood that guarantees your eternity in heaven.

You have come to Mount Zion. It is yours already. There the trumpets sound good news and praise to our Savior. The thunder of voices heard is praise and thanksgiving to God. **You have come to Mount Zion, to myriads of angels, to the festive gathering.** In heaven even the angels will join in the festal celebration with all of the saints, because angels, too, will marvel at God's love for us sinners. Revelation 5:12 records their song, **"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"** Already on earth we sing that song, sometimes off key. But in heaven, we will join the angels in perfect harmony to sing that hymn of praise.

**You have come to Mount Zion, to the Church of the firstborn...** In Biblical times, the firstborn was the heir of his father's property. Since you have been sprinkled with Jesus' blood, you are the firstborn of God. You receive the inheritance. You are heirs of all that Jesus accomplished for you.

**Your names are written (registered) in heaven...** The Greek word used here is to describe what ancient census takers did; they wrote your name down as a citizen of the state... an activity that is currently taking place in this country. In the same way God has written down the names of his family members in his book of life with the indelible ink of his grace. Having been sprinkled with Jesus' blood through baptism, your name is in that book. You now possess your reservation for a room in God's house.

**You have come to Mount Zion.** On this mountain, **you have already come to God, the Judge of all.** If you stand before a judge in a courtroom, it is a frightening experience if you know you're guilty. This thought will not be frightening for you as a believer. You will stand before the judge as his firstborn, covered with Christ's righteousness, sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb, and you will pass judgment. And when we do... **we will join the spirits of the righteous made perfect.** Ah! To stand beside Moses, Abraham, to listen to Paul or Peter or Martin Luther or our grandfathers. The souls of those righteous believers have already reached the goal of the heavenly Jerusalem. They now wait for their ancient graves to yield their bodies in the final resurrection of the dead, where both body and soul live together in heaven forever. This is the mountain you have come to already, to Mount Zion, having been sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb.

Those who have been injured in war either physically, mentally or spiritually, have many mountains to climb, that's why this weekend in Hardin County is so important, so that we do not forget those who sacrificed and bled and carry with them the hardships of combat. It is also good that we come here every week, to hear about the one who carried the load of our sins, and bled and died so that one day we will live in Mount Zion, where our griefs will be no more, but only joy and gladness with the angels and saints and with him who sprinkled his blood for us. To him be glory and honor forever and ever. Amen!