

December 1, 2013

"Come, Let's Go Up to the Mountain of the Lord"

ISAIAH 2:1-5

T*his is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.*

I grew up in the Upper Midwest where there were no mountains. There were rolling hills but no mountains. My first view of mountains came when I traveled to Arizona for spring break during my third year of college. In 1973 I moved to Santa Barbara where I fell in love with the mountains and trails of that beautiful city. In 1985 we moved to Tucson where we made the most of every opportunity to hike the mountains that loomed up large around the city. Every summer we try to find time to be in the mountains whether in California or the Northwest or most recently in Colorado. Last summer we camped and hiked in the Maroon Bells the mountains near Aspen. I love mountains.

We are not here to talk about my love for mountains or to hear you tell your story about your love for mountains. On this first Sunday in Advent we want to listen to what the prophet Isaiah tells us about the amazing mountain of the Lord. The Lord gave Isaiah a vision of people from all over the world streaming into the mountain of the Lord. The mountain of the Lord is the love, and forgiveness, and peace and salvation that we have in Jesus Christ our Savior. It rises above all the mountains of the world. This love of our God in Jesus his Son rises above everything else in life. Everything else is like a tiny little hill, or even a mound of dirt by comparison.

This past week a man from Santa Maria had his annual mountain top experience camping in front of Best Buy to be the first in line to get the good deals on expensive electronics. He told the news he has been doing this for the past six years. He buys over \$2500 in electronics. There is nothing wrong with getting up at four in the morning to get the good deals on special sales. However if you place too much hope and trust in material things of life you are missing out on the blessings that the Lord has for you on his holy mountain.

Come with us this morning. Put your hiking shoes on. Take your walking stick if you need one. We are going up to the mountain of the Lord to first see what a beautiful place this and then see the people who are streaming up this mountain from all over the world to see the glory of the Lord, his love for us in Jesus his Son.

What an amazing mountain this is

"This is what Isaiah, son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." Isaiah was surrounded by the people of Judah and Jerusalem who were making a rotten mess of their lives by worshipping Baal and other gods in place of the Lord. Here is how the Lord described these people in chapter one. "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption....From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness, only wounds and welts on open sores..." The Lord allows Isaiah to see a time when people will be taken out of their sinful condition and led up to the blessings the Lord has to offer on his holy mountain.

"In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised up above the hills, and all nations will stream to it." Notice this mountain of the Lord is found in a very specific place. It is a mountain that will rise up where the Lord's temple is found. The Lord's temple was built on Mount Zion, actually a hill within the walls of the city of Jerusalem. You can visit Jerusalem today and walk up to this Temple Mount. The Muslims claim this Temple Mount as the Dome of the Rock, the place where they allege Mohammed ascended into heaven. The Jews claim this as the place where the Lord will one day restore his temple when the Messiah returns. Some evangelicals say that this Temple Mount will someday rise up higher than Mount Everest when Jesus returns to reign in glory here on this earth.

This Temple Mount has tremendous significance for the world in which we live not because of what will happen there in the future but because of what happened in that place during the time of the Old Testament people. Every day people gathered in the temple of the Lord and they watched as priests offered sacrifices of lambs and goats and bulls to the Lord. These sacrifices involved the shedding of blood that pointed to the future sacrifice Jesus would give on the cross for our sins. There on the cross, not too far from the temple mount, Jesus offered his life for your sins and mine. It was near this temple mount that Jesus rose from dead to prove to the world that his perfect sacrifice for our sin was fully accepted by our heavenly Father. The highest point in the world and the highest point in your life is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The church father St Augustine had this to say about this mountain of the Lord, "Approach the mountain, climb the mountain, and you that do climb it, do not go back down it. There you will be safe, there you will be protected; Christ is your mountain of refuge." And so we sing our hymn, "In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light my strength my song." You know about this mountain that is above all mountains of the world. You look at other religions of the world and see them as small foothills, or rather little piles of dirt that offer no hope and no forgiveness of sins. These are worthless little piles of dirt that offer you the false hope of believing in yourself or some false god. Christ is the mountain of the Lord. All other so called great religions of the world are nothing but dirt piles.

If your greatest joy in life is your electronics than you have put your hope in a dirt pile because you know how the cell phone in your pocket that is two years old is already an antique. If you greatest joy in life is yourself, you have put your hope in dirt pile. "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling."

It is in this mountain of Christ our Lord that we find the true teachings that we need to lead us to great trust in him. "He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." "The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." People from all over the world will be saying to each other let's climb this mountain to find more about Jesus and his love for us. They will encourage each other with these words, "Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

We need Jesus to constantly teach us his Word so that we stay on this mountain of his salvation. As we gather with people on this holy mountain week after week, we know how frail and weak we are. Other religious books and self help books do not teach us the truth about our sinful condition. This law that goes out from Zion and this Word of the Lord from Jerusalem is brutally honest when it comes to letting me know the truth about my inner self. When I read these words from Jeremiah about my heart I have to hang my head in shame and guilt, and say with all honesty, "That's me! That's me!" "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mine." So we lock arms with fellow Christians on God's Holy Mountain and we pray the words of Psalm 139, "Search me O God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

So we say to each other these words: "Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord." Every light that sparkles and every candle that burns reminds us of the great truth that Jesus our Lord and Savior is the true light of the world. Psalm 27 says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation whom shall I fear?" In Jesus we find light and salvation. We find forgiveness of sin. Psalm 27 ends with the words, "Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." We wait for Jesus. He shows us the nail prints in his hands and says, "Peace to you. Your sins are forgiven." We wait for Jesus and he gives us his body and blood along with bread and wine." Listen to these amazing words about the mountain of the Lord in Hebrews 12, "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands and thousands of angels in joyful assembly, the church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven." It does not say you will come. It says you have come!

What amazing people these are

What is it like living on this holy mountain with God's holy people? It is a little bit of heaven on this earth. People change when they know the love that Jesus has for them. They want to live the way Jesus lived his life and love the way he has loved us. "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more."

What a powerful image of peace this is. Swords are heated in the blacksmith's fire and then they are pounded into plowshares. Think of an ancient plow as a stick pulled through the ground with a piece of metal to help it cut into the ground. Swords that killed people are now breaking up ground to feed people. Spears are pounded in pruning hooks. Instead of piercing people, they are now trimming branches from vines and trees to make them more fruitful. Mommy and Daddy had a few harsh words with each other. The children are upset. But then the next thing they see is Daddy coming up behind Mommy and giving

her a hug and kissing her. The love that Jesus has for us brings us the peace of knowing our sin is forgiven. With that peace comes the strength and the power to repent of sin and love people as Jesus loved them. Joseph was able to forgive his brothers even when they sold him into Egypt for slavery. We love mountains that show us what a glorious God we have. We love even more the mountain of the Lord where we see what Jesus has done for us. We love the people who keep encouraging us with these words: "Come let's go up the mountain of the Lord." Amen.