

Sermon Series - It's All About Jesus

Sermon Theme - His Mountain is the Highest Mountain

Sermon Text - Isaiah 2:1-5

First Sunday in Advent / Dec. 1, 2019

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin

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Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in his paths"

Dear Friends in Christ,

25 years ago, there was a headline in the newspaper of a former Lake City, MN man who decided after 20 years of living with a guilty conscience that he would confess to the murders of then mayor of Lake City and his wife. He finally admitted that when he was 14 years old he was drunk and high on marijuana and that he killed two people so he could experience what it was like to kill someone. In that article, he claimed that the reason he could keep this nasty secret to himself was that in recent years he had become a Christian. And since he had been going to church and studying the Bible, he felt the right thing to do was to make his confession and accept his punishment.

In our text for today, the prophet Isaiah predicted just this sort of thing. He said that in the latter days, the mountain of the Lord's house would be established on the top of the mountains, and that all nations shall flow to it, even Gentiles would come up to the mountain of the Lord, that is to say they would come into the house of the Lord, God would be teaching them his ways, and people would be walking in his paths.

When the teachings of Jesus Christ are allowed to have their way, hearts change, and lifestyles look different than they used to look. When Jesus Christ is ruling in the hearts of His people, people do the right things. Guilty people step forward and confess their faults to God and other people, peacemakers step forward and help anxious folks to calm down, and family events go better. When Jesus Christ has His way in our families, wives find a way to be patient with their husbands, husbands find a way to be kind to their wives, neighbors stop their bickering over small matters. Sinners who have fallen into often taking the low road in difficult and frustrating situations are drawn towards the high road.

You see, the ways of the Lord are higher than our ways, the thoughts and the plans of the Lord are higher than our thoughts and plans, and so today we start a four part series of sermons aimed at helping our Advent and Christmas in this place to be all about Jesus. Next Sunday, His Roots bear the Best Fruits, the Sunday after that - His Promises are Worth the Wait, and the Sunday after that, His Birth Changes Everything.

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Today, His Mountain is the Highest Mountain. Two mountains we would contrast today - Mt. Sinai and Mt. Calvary. Hebrews 12 teaches us that when the people of Israel came to Mt. Sinai, the mountain could be touched, there was blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice that scared the you know what out of people. At Sinai, sinners could not endure the orders that were given, without exception, sinners including Moses trembled with fear. But for those who came to Mt. Calvary where Jesus mediated a brand new covenant, everything changed.

Two lessons to learn this morning on this first Sunday in Advent. Lesson #1 is that at Mt. Sinai we have much to fear. Lesson #2 is that at Mt. Calvary we have nothing to fear.

Lesson #1 is that to be living under the Law at Mt. Sinai is to have much to fear.

In our Thanksgiving Day children's lesson, we read one of the saddest little notes you'll ever read. It was written by a foster child in Oklahoma about what she wanted for her family at Thanksgiving. She wanted food and water, she wanted a house with running water and lights, she wanted love and for mom and dad not to fight, she wanted clean clothes and a clean bed with covers. She wanted her family not to kill her pets and not to sell her toys and to be treated fair. She wanted nice shoes and for her parents not to get drunk and maybe somebody could help her with school

No doubt she was living in a family where there was much to fear. The enemies of the faith were winning the day, and the peace and the joy that only Jesus Christ could offer were nowhere to be found. Dear friends in Christ, we can be sure that in this Advent and Christmas season, the enemies of our faith will be as active as ever. The sinful world will be telling us that Christmas is mainly about eating, drinking, and being merry. The sinful flesh will be telling us that Christmas is mainly about me, myself, and I. The devil and his demons will be tempting us in a thousand different and often creative ways to take the low road full of darkness and all that comes with it.

In today's text, Isaiah was predicting an era when life would be very different. An age where the religion of Israel would be recognized as the correct religion by all the nations. When Isaiah refers to Mt. Zion, he is referring to a small hill in Jerusalem which was great because it was the location of the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. Nearby, the very Son of God would be sacrificed, and peace with an angry God would be purchased. Isaiah was predicting a time when Jerusalem would be a center of worship because that is where Jesus would die and that is where he would rise up again on the third day.

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Lesson #2 is that to be living under the Gospel at the foot of the cross at Mt. Calvary is to having nothing to fear.

Isaiah invites us today to live and move and have our being at the foot of the cross, where people are listening to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is teaching them his ways, and where the Good News is having its way.

A story is told about a queen of England who once read a book entitled "The Work and Words of Jesus." She enjoyed the book very much and then wrote to the author, *"I am sorry to say that I read the last chapter first, which is, I know, dreadful cheating. But it makes a wonderful and hopeful background for the rest of the book, and I do not regret it at all."*

Dear friends, when you listened to the Old Testament lesson for today, you were listening to the last chapter of your own personal book of life. And if you will pay attention to this particular prophecy, it will serve as a wonderful background for the chapters of life you must yet live out. The good news for us that we know how life turns out in the end, and because we know, we are able to live with a confidence and calmness unbelievers will never experience. Our lives become like those countless Hallmark movies some of us have watched, we know there is a happy ending. We don't get very worried when the circumstances of life go south, we know that that in fact, God is working everything out for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes.

Two invitations the prophet Isaiah would leave with us this morning, as we think of the New Testament Church as the highest of the mountains, as we think of making this Advent season all about Jesus Christ, as we think about what it means as a congregation and as individuals to be casting off the works of darkness and every day to be putting on the armor of light.

Invitation number 1 is to think of St Paul Lutheran congregation as a little city of lights to which all kinds of people would be attracted in this season of Advent. Isaiah describes the New Testament Church as the highest of the mountains to which all nations are drawn. (Perhaps you have visited Mankato in past years for the Kiwanis Festival of Lights. Starting at the end of November and going for 35 nights in a row, thousands and thousands of visitors from nearby communities are drawn to this beautiful and volunteer driven event. In 2015, 180,000 people streamed towards Sibley Park, which is lit up with 1.25 million energy efficient LED lights, In this case of Kiwanis Festival of Lights, the attraction is mainly the beauty of the decorated park, as well as the opportunity to donate food etc.

In the case of the church, the attraction is the message of God taking on human flesh, living among us for a time, suffering and dying in our place on a little hill outside of Jerusalem, rising again on the 3rd day, ascending into heaven on the 40th day, and sending out His Holy

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Spirit to kick off worldwide evangelization on the 50th day. This morning, I invite this congregation be seeing ourselves as part of that worldwide evangelization. To be thinking of ourselves as a little city of lights set on a hill, living and preaching and teaching in such a way that others are attracted to Jesus Christ.

Invitation #2 is to think for yourself what it will look like for you as an individual to be walking in the light of the Lord in this season of Advent. Listen again to Isaiah crying out, **Come O House of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord."**

The kingdom of God is like a medium size church in a medium sized city full of folks who understand that as often as they try to live apart from Jesus Christ, they are in effect living under the law, at Mt. Sinai, and they have much to fear. But as often as they drown their own works of darkness through contrition and repentance, that often the very light of the world will be rising up inside of their hearts and in charge. Which is another way of saying that as often as they live at the foot of Mt. Calvary, they have nothing to fear. They know that as often as they come into the sanctuary of their Church, their King is going to be meeting up with them with gifts of grace and mercy. They know that their chief assignment in Advent is the same as every season of the church year - it is to use their ears to hear what God is wanting to say to them. It is receive the gifts Jesus Christ is all about giving to them. It is ultimately about the Holy Spirit calling, gathering, enlightening and sanctifying the whole Christian Church on earth. They look forward to that day when the military will be out of business, swords will be melted down into ploughs, spears will give way to pruning hooks, nations will stop lifting up swords against one another, all darkness will have to flee in the presence of Light.

Come, dear people of God, let your light so shine before men, that they might see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. May this Advent season be all about Jesus Christ. Amen.