

Hebrews 12:18-24

Here's a stupid question...Which of these two mountains would you rather approach? The blazing fire, darkness, gloom, and terror of Mt. Sinai, or the heavenly festivity of Mt. Zion? To be sure, God dwells on both of these mountains. Read Exodus 19 & 20 and recall that He descended on Sinai when He gave His Law, the Ten Commandments, through Moses. And God also dwells in Zion which is His church.

So there are two ways to approach God...two mountains. But be warned, for a careful read of Exodus tells us that none of God's people dared approach Mt. Sinai. Anyone, or anything, that even touched the mountain was put to death. Even Moses, who was allowed to ascend Sinai, trembled in the presence of God. Yet even as Sinai is a terrifying sight, Zion is delightfully inviting. So again...which mountain for you? Stupid question.

But then answer me this... Why is it that so many people, we can say the vast majority of people, hang out at Mt. Sinai and attempt to approach God there? And even we ourselves have this inclination.

Well we're all born there on the plains of Sinai. We are not born within the church of Zion. But we are born under the Law. And it's the only way we know, by nature, to approach God and ascend into heaven.

But Sinai is the mountain of death, for the Law accuses sinners, and such are we. Heaven cannot be reached by way of Sinai. If we could keep the Ten Commandments perfectly which God gave there, we could ascend that mountain. But we cannot. We are born in sin; all people are. The only way, therefore, that we can approach God and enter into heaven is by way of Mt. Zion.

And this way, this mountain, is a gift. *"You have not come...says our text, but you have come..."* You have not come to Mt. Sinai, but you have come to Mt. Zion. And on this day, because he was baptized this morning, I put it this way: You, Noah Matthew Rinne, have not come to Mt. Sinai...but you, Noah, have come to Mt. Zion.

It is a dreadful thing that so many place Holy Baptism with Mt. Sinai and not with Mt. Zion. They do this when they deny that baptism is God's sacrament. "Baptism is not God's work," they say, "but our work." But then it belongs to the Law. It belongs to that terrifying sight of fire, darkness, and gloom; to that mountain of death, Mt. Sinai.

But this morning Noah was given life.; life in Christ, eternal life. Thus the Scriptures declare. Holy Baptism belongs to Mt. Zion, and so does every other gift of God's grace. *"You have come to Mt. Zion,"* says our text, *"and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to (those who) are enrolled in heaven...to Jesus (whose) sprinkled blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."*

The three words, *"You have come..."* are one word in the Greek. And that word is a liturgical word. It refers to worship; to entering into the Divine Service. Everything...every gift of God's

grace which is of Mt. Zion is given here in the gathering of God's people around Word and Sacrament.

But it's a gift to be drawn to Mt. Zion. Our old sinful flesh stubbornly insists that by living a good life we qualify for heaven; that we can indeed approach God by way of Sinai. Friend, do not be deceived. It is only by way of the church, Mt. Zion, that we ascend to God, for in Zion He descends to us.

Look at our text. Where are God's angels? Not on Sinai, but on Zion. Where are all the saints of heaven? Not on Sinai, but on Zion. Where is Jesus with His saving blood? Not on Mt. Sinai, but on Mt. Zion. It is a gift of God that He has drawn you to Zion. Here is Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Here are the saints of heaven and the angels who join with us in worship. Here is God's "Yes" to us, for here is Jesus.

But look around you and you see sinners. Look at the person sitting next to you. Look at your own heart and life. Sinners, all of us. How can God draw that person to Mt. Zion? How can He draw me, a poor sinner, here to this place of holiness? By the blood of Jesus, my friend.

Our text declares an amazing truth. Jesus' blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Abel was murdered by his brother Cain. And his blood cries out from the ground says Scripture. It cries out for vengeance. Jesus, too, was murdered. His blood ran down the cross into the ground. But Jesus' blood does not cry out for vengeance. It speaks a better word. It speaks the word of mercy. Jesus' blood cries out to God to forgive sinners, even those who murdered Him.

Wherever Jesus' blood is found, His blood is crying out. Never for revenge, but always for pardon. And Jesus' blood is on you. In your baptism you were sprinkled with His blood. In the sacrament on the altar you partake of His blood. And in the word of absolution, spoken again to each one of you this morning, you are assured that you are forgiven by the blood of Jesus which was shed for you.

Jesus' blood speaks says our text. Present tense. It never stops speaking. His blood never stops crying out for you to receive pardon. You can never sin too much; you can never sin too grievously, or commit that same sin over and over, so that Jesus' blood stops crying out for you. Remember your baptism always. You always live in the blood of Christ. You are forgiven. Every one of you is forgiven.

And so do not hang out at Sinai. Oh you and I need the Law in our life to crucify our sinful flesh. But you now live on Mt. Zion. For here God has drawn you to dwell with all His saints, with His angels; to dwell with Jesus. Amen.