

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

The safest thing for us may be to avoid mountains altogether. Not because they're stressful to climb necessarily, nor because there is always the danger of slipping and falling, but because it's rough up there. Peter, James, and John became terrified at the top of their mountain. Peter even got a little loony, saying things which made no sense. And when Moses reached the top of Mt. Nebo he died. It can get pretty rough up there. Better for us to stay put in the safety of our plains and valleys.

And yet nothing worthwhile ever happens unless we're out climbing the mountains. The challenges we face in life; the hills that we have to keep climbing; the mountain peaks that are so stressful to get over, are what shape our character. Life is not a safe, easy walk through the valleys and plains—it's a constant climbing up and over the mountains and hills that come our way. And it's best not to avoid these mountains, because God shapes us and strengthens us as we face and endure life's difficulties.

Tim and Sharon do not believe in staying safe and neither do the rest of you who brought your children to Holy Baptism; because now that Claire is baptized, Satan is her worst enemy. Before today, Satan didn't care much about Claire. But now that she belongs to Jesus, he is after her in the worst way. He hates her and he wants to take her back away from Jesus. Now that Claire is baptized, Satan is her sworn enemy.

It would have been a lot safer in many ways to have not had her baptized, because now the devil will throw many obstacles in her path through life. He will try to trip her up and get her to fall away from Christ. This is why Christian parents need to follow baptism with teaching, as Jesus commands. If we do not bring our baptized children to God's House regularly, and teach them daily about their Savior, we are doing nothing less than sending our troops into war-torn Iraq but not giving them the weapons and provisions they need to survive.

And so, Tim and Sharon, I commend you for believing that it is better to bring your daughter to Jesus in baptism even though her life as a Christian will be climbing one mountain after another. Because even though it is difficult to live as a Christian in the world, that is far better than trying to play it safe with Satan.

And I encourage you and all Christian parents to arm your children. Their enemy is deadly and he hides in the rocks and crevices of each hill and mountain. Do not send out your children as lambs in the midst of wolves. Arm them to the teeth! Give them Jesus—here in His Word and Sacrament week after week, and at home day after day.

One day your children will, like Moses, climb their last mountain. They will face their Mt. Nebo, and they will not make it over the top. Like Moses, they will die up there. Now he was 120 when he died on Mt. Nebo, but I doubt that our children will live that long. None of us will. We need to realize that each and every mountain may be our last. We don't know which one is our Mt. Nebo.

Many of you have watched loved ones climb their Mt. Nebo. They faced the challenge of heart surgery, but they did not make it over the mountain. They died up there on Mt. Nebo. For many, their Mt. Nebo was cancer. For others it was a car wreck. For some it

was the flu or pneumonia. We very likely will not recognize Mt. Nebo when it comes. But God knows. He knew that Moses would die on Mt. Nebo, and He knows which of our mountains is our Mt. Nebo.

Do not be afraid. For Jesus already climbed up His Mt. Nebo for you. It was called Calvary and there was a cross up there. That was actually your cross and mine. It had our name on it, for it was covered with our sins and guilt. But Jesus took that cross for you. He suffered the pain of your guilt. He was punished for your sins. And there, on His Mt. Nebo, Jesus died. He died for you.

Like Moses, Jesus was strong and healthy before He died. They had beaten Him senseless. They had whipped the strength out of Him. But He died in His prime. No disease took Him. He willingly laid down His life. He did it for you, so that you and your children can confidently walk toward your Mt. Nebo. Because of Jesus, Nebo does not have the last word. Jesus conquered Mt. Nebo for you. He died up there, but He rose again three days later. Nebo does not have the last word—Jesus does. And His word is, “Because I live, you shall live also.”

Moses died on Mt. Nebo, and yet we see him standing alive with Jesus on the Mt. Transfiguration. Because Jesus lives, Moses who believed in Him lives also. And your loved ones live. All who live and die in Christ, live forever with Christ. In the last five years I have watched as your loved ones struggled up their Mt. Nebo. Men and women with the names Becker, Beumer, Nadler, Diederich, and Fuhr. And as they climbed up their mountain they were not afraid, for they trusted in Jesus. They believed that their Savior had died on His mountain for them, and so even as they climbed their last mountain; even as they breathed their last—they, like Moses, could look out over the Promised Land—the land that belonged to them, for Jesus had given it to them in their baptism. And because Jesus lives, they live with Him. They may have died on Mt. Nebo, but now we see them standing with Christ in glory.

God had told Moses that he could not enter the Promised Land. Because of his disobedience at a place called Meribah, Moses would see the Land of Canaan from a distance, but he himself would not enter it. Because of our disobedience we also are not worthy to enter the Promised Land. We do not obey God. We obey our sinful flesh. We do not want to be told how to live; we desire to live by our own laws and standards. For this, Moses was barred from entering the Land of Promise. And this also is our fate.

But rejoice dear sinner. God does not leave you in your sins and disobedience. After climbing Mt. Nebo, Moses died and was buried. But God did not leave him there. Because Jesus died on another mountain, we rejoice to see Moses standing on Mt. Zion with Christ. With Elijah he stands there alive and in glory.

And neither will God abandon you on your mountain. Our sins bar us from the Land of Promise, but God forgives your sins for Jesus' sake. Our disobedience to God makes us unworthy to live in the Promised Land, but in your baptism God declares that you are worthy, for He covers your disobedience with the holiness of Jesus.

And so climb each mountain in your life. Climb in the strength of Christ. You are His baptized child, and so He goes with you and before you. The way is not easy, for the

temptations and challenges are many. But the way is sure and certain because you are forgiven in Jesus. You need fear no mountain that comes your way—Jesus is with you. You need not fear when your Mt. Nebo arrives. Nebo does not have the last word. Jesus does. God did not tell Peter, James, and John to “listen to the mountain”...He said, “Listen to Jesus!” And Jesus says that you belong to Him, and therefore heaven is yours.

Like Moses, you will one day climb your Mt. Nebo, and you will die up there. But the story continues in Christ. For Jesus will carry you from Mt. Nebo to stand in glory with Him and all His saints. And that, dear friend, is the last word—for it is Jesus’ gracious word to you in your baptism. Amen.