

Pentecost 14C

August 29, 2010

Hymns: 339 - 285 v1,2,11,12 - 207

HEBREWS 12:18-28 (Slide 1 during text reading)
LISTEN TO THE GOD WHO SHAKES THINGS UP!

***God's Law Rightly "Shakes Us Up."**

***God's Gospel Gives Us A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken.**

Dear Worshipers,

Nothing will make you religious any quicker than a good earthquake. When the ground around you is shaking, it is only human to seek that which is unshakable. In Hebrews 12: 29 we come to another of the writer's notable "therefores." He writes, **Slide 2 "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe . . ."** Interesting words for the times in which we live!

Slide 3 We live in a world that all too easily can be shaken. That's the first thing we need to see from this passage in Hebrews. And that is one of the great understatements of life. This past January you and I were inundated with horrific images of the terrible earthquake that shook the tiny, impoverished nation of Haiti. The shaking started on Tuesday, January 12, at 4:53 p.m. EST about 10 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince. The shaking lasted anywhere from 35 seconds to up to a minute which, researchers tell us, is a long time for the ground to be shaking. The effect of this shaking was magnified by the shoddy infrastructure of this impoverished nation. The earthquake, the worst in the region in more than 200 years, left the country in a shambles and left more than 200,000 dead.

Later in February a larger but far less destructive quake hit the South American country of Chile. It was a reminder to us of how vulnerable our world is to natural disasters. While these earthquakes were terrible, almost beyond imagination, they were not the worst earthquakes that history has known. The deadliest earthquake in history struck Shaanxi, China, in 1556, killing an estimated 830,000 people.

We live in a world that can all too easily be shaken. We all know that's true. For example, within the past two years we have seen the earth shake beneath some of our largest financial institutions. As this ground shook, experts tell us our country stood on the edge of a financial collapse comparable to the Great Depression. We live in a world that can be all too easily shaken--financial meltdowns, terrorism, all kinds of public disasters, and an endless array of personal tragedies that can happen at any time to you or those you love--automobile accidents, sickness, loss of a job, breakup of a marriage, random violence. This is a cruel world.

Slide 4 Sometimes we wonder, don't we? And the really frustrating thing is that being a Christian does not protect you from the earth shaking beneath your feet. **We live in a world where everything that really matters can be shaken up in just a heartbeat.** In it all, we are to remember that God has His purposes to fulfill in everything He allows to happen in this world.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us about the nation of Israel getting shaken up one day at Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai is earthly and touchable. It still stands rugged and real in the desert. What happened at that mountain the day God gave His Commandments was completely unearthly! The blazing fire, the thick smoke, the impenetrable blackness, the howling whirlwind, the escalating trumpet blasts, the ground and mountain shaking – All these awed the people, filling them with a deep sense of God's presence and power. To people already standing on shaking ground, the sound of God's voice speaking the commandments was just too much. They were now trembling and shaking all on their own! So, they begged Moses, *Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us – or we will die! (Exodus 2);19).*

The entire scene at Sinai was so filled with fear and foreboding that Moses, their leader and God's friend, himself was shaking! All who witnessed the giving of the Law at Sinai were awed by the supernatural demonstration of God's holiness and power. God was shaking things up to make a point – do you think!? What exactly was it?! Namely this – The Law of God with its thunder and trumpets can provide no pardon for sin-troubled hearts or peace for sin-torn consciences. All it offers is the awesome revelation of God's righteous requirements and the horrible fear of His just punishment over infractions. All it can do is point out the impassable and impossible distance sin puts between man and God, but the Law can offer nothing to

bridge the gap.

There is no future at Mount Sinai, no access to God, no acceptance by God, no eternity with God. But what do men do!? They try getting to heaven by means of the Law anyway! Misled by the devil, misguided by their own conceit, misinformed by their heathen religious leaders (and sometimes even “Christian Church” leaders), they dare to think they can approach a holy God by means of what they do. What tragedy to try to touch a holy God in this way only to receive eternal death in hell!

BUT.... the author begins a sharp contrast. **You have come.....**he reminds his readers, pointing out how far they have been carried and where they are now standing by the grace of God. Already they have come **to Mount Zion...** Zion was the highest hill in Jerusalem - on which the temple of God was built. “Zion” here refers to heaven – the dwelling place of the Most High. Already on earth the believer owns heaven. Already today he possesses tomorrow. There in Zion stands the city of which the earthly Jerusalem was but a faint shadow. There dwells the living God in the eternal city of which He is both the architect and builder.

The writer tells us that there we will be in the company of *thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly*. How awesome is that!? Believers will have more companions, for we are part of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. All believers have the rank of firstborn in God’s sight. They are heirs of His salvation with all that it offers. And Scripture loves the expression “written in heaven.” In Luke 10:20, Jesus told His disciples: *Rejoice that your names are written in heaven!* Each believer carries citizenship papers for heaven, written in the indelible ink of God’s grace. Every believer on earth has a room reserved in the Father’s house!

In the middle of this glorious scene God is called *the Judge of all men*. Should it trouble you as a believer that God will judge all men – and do it justly?! Should we shake in our boots at that prospect?! If you and I are going to stand before the righteous Judge one day as His firstborn sons, then we don’t have to fear! In fact, we will stand clothed in the righteousness of the very One Who judges us that day – the Son of God! Without Jesus and His blood we would have no free access to the Father’s throne, no inheritance in the Father’s house, no company with rejoicing angels, no fellow believers as companions along the way, no mercy in the judgment, no hope beyond the grave. But you and I have Jesus!

The author points us to Jesus – the mediator of a new covenant (other than the one calling for perfect keeping of the Law!) and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. What’s his point? The spilt blood of Abel in Genesis 4:10 is described as crying out to God for vengeance. Christ’s blood sprinkled over us sinners speaks of pardon and peace!

So – what will it be for each of you sitting in the pews this morning?! Sinai or Zion? The Law’s loud thunder or the Gospel’s tender love?! The Law’s curse, *Your iniquities have separated you from your God (Isaiah 59:2)* or the Gospel’s inviting cry, *Come, for everything is now ready! (Luke 14:17)*? Dear sinner, will it be for you the catastrophe of an endless hell or the consummation of an everlasting heaven?! The answer is found only in the Gospel message of Jesus’ blood and in faith worked by the Spirit through that message. **Slide 5 The Good News is that we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken.** God help us day by day to fill faith’s lungs with heaven’s pure air even as we pray, *Jesus, in mercy bring us to that dear land of rest, Who art with God the Father and Spirit, ever blest!*

On Sinai, when God spoke His Law, the mountain shook – the whole mountain trembled violently. But that stupendous earth-shaking was nothing compared to what is coming. Once more the Lord will do some shaking. When Christ returns on the Last Day, not only the earth, but the heavens around it will rock and reel. The “created things” which seemed so permanent will perish. All the shaken things will be removed. Only that “which cannot be shaken” will remain. The author has told us what the unshaken thing is – It is the heavenly Jerusalem, the city with sure, eternal foundations, Mount Zion, where the living God dwells and where all His children will live with Him forever.

Have you received that kingdom of grace or are you still trying to build this life and the next on the shifting sand of the Law?! We live in a world that can easily be shaken. God wants to give us a center of calm when the foundation of our lives is wobbling. It is God’s free gift to us. It is His Kingdom of grace in Christ’s cross. It is a Kingdom that will turn into a Kingdom of glory in the life to come. **Slide 6 “Therefore, since**

we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe . . .” God grant it for Jesus’ sake! Amen!

CHILDREN’S SERMON Object: a dollar bill

Good morning, boys and girls:

This morning I brought with me a piece of money, a dollar, and I want us to look at it for just a moment. On the front of our dollar is a picture of George Washington, the first President of the United States of America. But it’s what’s on the back of the dollar that I want us to focus on for a few minutes.

If you turn the dollar over, you will see two circles. If you look at the left-hand circle, you will see a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid is an all-seeing eye, an ancient symbol for God. There are two Latin words above the pyramid, ANNUIT COEPTIS, which means, "God has favored our undertaking." In the middle you will see the words, "IN GOD WE TRUST." Our country has always been a religious country. If you look at the right-hand circle, what do you see? That’s right, it’s an eagle.

Why do you think we have an eagle on the back of our dollars? For thousands of years, eagles have been used as symbols of peace and strength. Even back in Jesus’ time, people put a picture of an eagle on the back of their money. If you’ll notice, the eagle’s wings are spread out; this is a symbol of the eagle protecting us. This eagle on the back of the dollar is supposed to represent peace to us--no war, no trouble, nothing to be afraid of.

Our Bible tells us that someday we will live in a world of perfect peace. That is God’s plan. He has promised us a Kingdom that cannot be shaken. But here’s what’s really neat. Even today we can have peace in our hearts just by trusting God in all things. Think of that every time you see an eagle on a piece of money. Let it remind you that "IN GOD WE TRUST." We can trust God because He loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to live a perfect life here on this earth and then give that perfect life up to His Father as payment for our sins. In our Baptisms God has favored us with faith for undertaking all the years we will live in this world. As God’s children, our heavenly Father puts His wings around us and protects all our way through life until we reach our home with Him in heaven. Let’s pray:

Jesus, we can trust You to take care of us all the days of our lives. We will not shake in fear, because we know Your great love for us that moved You to die on the cross for our sins. Lord Jesus, since You love me – Oh, spread Your wings above me and shield me from all harm. Though Satan would assail me, Your mercy will not fail me. I rest in Your protecting arms (CW 587 v3). Amen.