

Nov. 19, 2017

## Lesson 12: High Priest of the New Covenant

Scripture: Hebrews 12: 14-15; 18-29

### **Context:**

This week we jump into the New Testament with the Book of Hebrews. The Book of Hebrews is known as a history lesson infused with preaching. The book contains the story of the Israelites and the ancestors that make up Jesus' family tree. Great visuals are given to help the earliest audience and those of us today imagine what our journey of faith looks like.

In chapter twelve, the author makes a comparison of what the Kingdom of God should look like today by contrasting two mountains. The first mountain described echoes Mt. Sinai: something untouchable, burning fires, darkness, shadows, and fear inducing. Not even Moses, the leader of God's people, feels that he can come near the mountain or God. This is the mountain that you do not want to go near.

The other mountain that actually reflects the Kingdom of God is Mt. Zion. This mountain is one where God lives and it looks like a festival. Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, is the one who is on this mountain extending hospitality to all. There's no doubt that this is the mountain you want for your travel plans. The travel guide indicates that this is the best one to see and experience.

Yet, there is still a warning about this mountain. God rules this mountain and will continue to shake. Even the inhabitants from time to time will be jolted. Going back to verses fourteen and fifteen, this place is one where all are to experience God's grace and there is not to be bitterness that grows among them. It pollutes the mountain and causes issues. Instead, the inhabitants are to be grateful on Mt. Zion serving God with gratitude and living at peace with all. God will continue to purify the mountain like a consuming fire at a blacksmith shop. All will be melted and molded time and time again so that God's mountain can be a place of peace and celebration. Mt. Zion is to be a place where all are welcome and where bitterness and hatred do not have a place.

### **Application:**

Have you ever been on a trip before and used a travel book to help you figure out where you were going to visit? I know that I've used guides not only for trips internationally, but also for when I visit cities or places of interests. What are the best restaurants? Which place has the best deal? What are the pros and cons to staying in a certain location? Those are all questions we ask when thinking about the journey we want to take.

The Book of Hebrews and the passage today provide a travel guide for our journey of faith. In this case we learn that there are certain things to avoid on our journey of faith because they really will not help us. One is bitterness that grows between people; God's grace is enough to cover everyone. Others things to avoid include things like fear of God and fear of others. Mt. Sinai was a part of the Israelite journey that was terrifying because that covenant seemed like one built upon rules and regulations, fear and trembling. There was no accessibility to it or invitation to grow.

We see this sometimes even in our model of church. People can grow bitter when

things aren't done their way. Ministries may have to be remolded or even abandoned when they no longer serve their original purpose. Sometimes the results are bitterness between even church people. The same goes for churches that function on the premise: "We've always done it that way." Whenever there is a change or even new people, the first thing do is to shout or make it clear what the unwritten rules are for how to fit in or even function.

But what we hear in this new covenant through Christ is that God is always doing new things. Mt. Zion is a place that is anything but static. There are angels singing and a constant shaking as the people are grateful to be there and move out of the way as God consumes the entire mountain. The church is to be the same way. Sometimes it means trying new things in worship or starting ministries that may be more fruitful at reaching new people for Christ. There might also be the ending to old ministries so that these new ones can flourish. Peace happens between people as they see one another as partners in ministry and not an enemy to be defeated. God is at work when new people are welcomed to the church and encouraged to become a part of the fabric of the community without having to fit into certain categories or boxes.

Does your church look like a Mt. Sinai or a Mt. Zion? The text makes it clear that both are a reality. The one though that catches our attention and calls our name though is the one where Jesus dwells inviting those to come to the mountain and to be transformed. It is a place where there is peace, love, and respect for one another. It is a place where the people see their jobs as active participants embracing those who come to the mountain and trying to new things as God works through them. It is the "City on the Hill," the place where Christ's love is shared with all.

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh  
Associate Pastor  
First United Methodist Church  
1380 W. Main St.  
Dothan, AL 36301  
Office (334) 793-3555 ext. 240  
E-mail: [hunter@fumcdothan.org](mailto:hunter@fumcdothan.org)

