THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Hebrews 12:18-24

The Mountains of God

"There are many paths up the mountain." This is a popu ar e!pression these "ays. Peop e i#e to $uote it to i ustrate their % aim that there is more than one &ay to ' o". Su%h peop e nee" to (ourney &ith us to"ay) *e%ause to"ay + &ant to ta#e you on a tour. + &ant to ta#e you on one path to t&o mountains. Ea%h mountain is a mountain on &hi%h ' o" "&e s. Ea%h mountain pro,i"es a &ay to approa%h Him. These are the on y t&o &ays to approa%h Him. Come on this tour &ith me to"ay. Sur,ey ea%h mountain. Ta#e into a%%ount &hat you see) -ee) an" hear. Consi"er &hi%h mountain you &ish to approa%h.

The -irst mountain on our tour is . t. Sinai) the mountain o- ' o"/s a&. The &riter to the He*re&s "es%ri*es it as *the mountain that may not be touched, a mountain of blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.* 0 hy a the spe%ia e--e%ts1 2e%ause ' o" is ma#in3 a point at Sinai. A &ho approa%h ' o" throu3h His a& approa%h Him in His &rath) -or no one) an" + mean no one) %an #eep His a& per-e%t y) *oth a%%or"in3 to the etter an" the spirit o- it. 0 hen ' o" spo#e to +srae -rom Sinai) they &ere terri-ie". Rea" E!o"us 45) &here ' o" re,ea s the Ten Comman"ments. Noti%e &hat happens (ust a-ter He 3i,es them to +srae . . oses &rites) *"Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.'"* Don/t *e mista#en) not on y &as the &ay ' o" spo#e terri-yin3) *ut &hat He sai". ' o" ha" %on"emne" i"o atry) the misuse o- His name) ne3 e%t o- His &or") "iso*e"ien%e to the authorities) mur"er) se!ua immora ity) stea in3) 3ossip) an" %o,etin3. ' o" ha" %on"emne" the +srae ites. ' o" ha" %on"emne" the entire human ra%e) *e%ause e,ery man) &oman) an" %hi " on ' o"/s 3reen earth has *ro#en at east one o- these %omman"ments) an" -ai e" to -ear) o,e) an" trust in ' o" a*o,e a thin3s. An" #no&in3 you ha,e s appe" the on y true ' o" in the -a%e) the ' o" &ho spea#s thun"er) *reathes -ire) an" -umes in an3er &ith smo#e that en,e ops mountains) that is a s%ary prospe%t.

Ho& is your ,isit to Sinai so -ar1 Are you en(oyin3 it1 Are you rea y oo#in31 6oo#. See an" -ee your sins at Sinai. ' o" says that e,en the anima that tou%hes this ho y mountain must *e stone". 0 hat shou " *e "one to us) &ho ha,e sinne" so &i -u y) persistent y) an" * atant y1 Consi"er those Ten Comman"ments han"e" "o&n at Sinai. Ha,e you o,e" ' o" a*o,e a thin3s1 Ha,e you misuse" His name1 Ha,e you ne3 e%te" or -ai e" to support His 0 or" an" it/s prea%hin31 Ha,e you "iso*eye" the authorities) so mu%h as spee"in31 Ha,e you mur"ere" or hate" another person in your heart1 Ha,e you %ommitte" se!ua sin outsi"e o- marria3e or *e-ore it) &ith internet porn or ust-u thou3hts1 Ha,e you sto en e,en a pen%i -rom &or# or s%hoo 1 Ha,e you s an"ere" another or 3ossipe"1 Ha,e the sins o- others stoppe" in your ears or *een transmitte" throu3h your mouth1 Ha,e you %o,ete" the property) the -ami y) or the spouse o- another an" -or3ot to *e 3rate-u -or &hat ' o" has 3i,en you a rea"y1 "Ha,e you1 Ha,e you1 Ha,e you1" Thus ' o" thun"ers -rom Sinai.

This is a terri-yin3 mountain) *e%ause &hether or not you &i a"mit it to me or e,en to yourse -) you ha,e %ome to Sinai as one &ho is un% ean) some o- you ha,e %ome &ithout e,en trem* in3) %on-i"ent in the "e usion o- sin an" the man7ma"e s%a es o- -a se ri3hteousness. Those "e usions "ie here) *e%ause here is an a 7#no&in3 an" an3ry ' o") an" He #no&s a a*out an" is an3ry &ith you. 0 hether or not you *e ie,e that no&) you &i one "ay &hen 8esus spea#s the &or"s in our Ho y ' ospe) *"Depart from Me, all you workers of evil."* There are no e!%uses on Sinai) no se%rets) no semanti%s) an" no oopho es) no %omparison to others. There is on y the &rath o- ' o" -or none other than you. This is not the am*i,a ent *u""y73o" that the &or " has %ra-te") &ho &in#s at sin an" a%%epts peop e (ust the &ay they are. No) this is the ' o" &ho "eman"s per-e%tion) &ho %omes &ith thun"er)

i3htnin3) smo#e) an" the soun" o- the trumpet) an" &ho terri-ies a &ho "are approa%h Him. Do you i#e Sinai1 0 e) i- you thin# ' o" is 3oin3 to et you "&e &ith Him in hea,en *e%ause o- your &or#s an" your theories) stay here &ith . oses an" ta#e your %han%es) *ut those o- you &ho %an sme the -ires o- he) an" "on/t i#e the aroma) %ome &ith me to the se%on" mountain) to 9ion.

The &riter to the He*re&s says) *"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in the festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."*

You have come…to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,…to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. +n other &or"s) you ha,e %ome to the Chur%h. The &or" -or "assem* y" in ' ree# is *ecclesia*) &hi%h is a so the &or" -or the Chur%h. The Chur%h is hea,en on earth. +t is the Chur%h o- the -irst*orn) that is) the assem* y o- those set asi"e -or ' o". +t is &here the saints on earth 3ather &ith the saints o- hea,en an" -east to3ether at ' o"/s a tar on ' o" Himse -. +t is &here the "ea" spea# throu3h the i,in3) as the pastor prea%hes the 0 or" o- ' o") &ritten "o&n *y the an%ients -or those 3athere" here to"ay. The Chur%h is the ,isitor/s %enter -or the hea,en y 8erusa em) &here &hat &e hear) see) an" taste no& *y -aith &i *e hear") seen) an" taste" then &ith our o&n ears) eyes) an" mouths. The Chur%h is a these thin3s) not *e%ause o- the peop e &ho 3ather aroun" the . eans o- ' ra%e) &hi%h *irth the Chur%h) *ut *e%ause the Chur%h is *ui t on Christ an" "ispenses Christ to those &ho 3ather aroun" Him. Here in this Chur%h) on . ount 9ion) &e %an approa%h the "8u"3e o- a " &ithout -ear) *e%ause this 8u"3e is a so the Sa,ior o- a &ho has esta* ishe" this ne& mountain o- mer%y that a may %ome to Him an" *e sa,e". He is the Sa,ior o- a &ho has turne" the trem* in3) terri-ie" sinners o- Sinai into the *"righteous made perfect"* o- 9ion. He is 8esus) *"the mediator of a new covenant,"* the u timate Passo,er 6am*) &hose 2 oo" a one %ou " %a m the an3er o- the * oo"thirsty ' o" o- Sinai) an" &hose 2 oo" a one ma#es saints o- pri%e ess &orth out o- &orth ess sinners. He is the ' o" o- 9ion) &here ho iness an" mer%y) (usti%e an" 3ra%e meet an" are met.

On top o- . t. Sinai to"ay there rests a monastery. . en - ee -rom the &or " to i,e there an" earn their &ay to ' o". They a*an"on the Ten Comman"ments) &hi%h ur3e us to i,e as sa t in the &or ") not to run a&ay -rom it) an" ma#e up ne& &or#s that they %onsi"er superior to the ones ' o" Himse - ur3e". They may *e a* e to see 9ion -rom atop Sinai) *ut they re-use to "&e on the mountain o- ' o"/s 3ra%e.

A &ea thy an" rather uns%rupu ous *usinessman on%e to " . ar# T&ain that *e-ore he "ie" he &as 3oin3 ta#e a pi 3rima3e to . t. Sinai an" rea" the Ten Comman"ments out ou" on top o- it. T&ain rep ie") " 0 hy "on/t you (ust stay in 2oston an" #eep them." The *usinessman ha" re-use" to see his o&n sin an" &as "e u"e" in his o&n -a se piety. He thou3ht ' o" shou " *e happy &ith his ip ser,i%e. He nee"e" a &a#e up %a) to see ho& mu%h he ha" -a en short o- ' o"/s "eman" -or per-e%tion) to see Sinai -or &hat it &as: the mountain o- ' o"/s an3er an" o- he -or a &ho thin# that ' o" o&es them anythin3. On &hi%h mountain are you "&e in31 0 i you % in3 to your o&n re i3ious theories or to the re*e ion o- your ha*itua sins an" ta#e your %han%es &ith ' o" at Sinai1 + hope not) *e%ause ' o" &arns a*out su%h re*e ion in our -irst esson: *"For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."* Don/t *e ie,e in he . 0 e) +/" i#e to *e ie,e Ohio "i"n/t e!ist) *ut my "enia o- its e!isten%e isn/t 3oin3 to ta#e it o-- the map.

. y -rien"s) - ee &ith me to 9ion) &here the Sa,ior rei3ns. There is no monastery there) *ut there is a ta* e set &ith 3ra%e. 8esus is %a in3 you. He %a s out to a in the Ho y ' ospe) -rom east an" &est) north an" south) to *"recline at [His] table in the kingdom of God."* Come to ' o" at 9ion. Re% ine at His ta* e to"ay. Hear His 3ra%ious 0 or" o- mer%y. Treasure your enro ment in hea,en *y 2aptism. 6ea,e your sins at Sinai) an" return to them no more) *e%ause *y %omin3 to 9ion) you/,e %ome to *"Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word that the blood of Abel."* An" that &or" is "-or3i,en)" an" it/s spo#en % ear y an" -ore,er. Amen.