

Let Us Go Up to the Mountain of the Lord

Isaiah 2:1-5 (NIV)

¹ This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: ² In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. ³ Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁵ Come, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

The season of Advent is a season of expectation. The word "advent" means "coming." Here at the church, we probably think first and foremost of Jesus' coming as he did so many years ago in Bethlehem on that very first Christmas. But you probably quickly learned today through our Bible readings that in celebrating Advent we are not just looking back to the event of Christmas – the birth of the Christ Child, the Savior of the world. We look beyond that day to the last days just as Isaiah did.

"In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it." (verse 2) Isaiah saw a day coming when the Lord's temple would rise above all the hills, positioned on the highest mountain. Worship of the Lord would rise above the worship of anything else in the world. It would be held up as the highest, the most prominent. All nations would stream to it. Everyone would come from all over to be at the temple of the Lord and worship him. People's conversations would be, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (verse 3)

What kind of conversations do you have about coming to church? Is it a conversation that basically involves you harassing your family, your friends to come with you, that on Sunday morning you come to wake up your child, tell them that they have to get up to get ready for church, and you get moaning in response, a roll over and cover themselves back up with their blankets to ignore you? Do you poke your spouse, tell them that you're going to church, and you get no response back, so you throw your hands in the air and finish getting ready and go to church by yourself? Do you not even ask the people in your household to come with you because you basically know what their answer will be? Do you never bring it up with your friends?

Some mornings can be really hard for us to get going, to get out of bed, and to make it here. As one of our members put it, "Satan makes the bed warm and the floor cold on Sunday mornings." We have our own barriers in coming to the house of the Lord, things that try to stop us. Sometimes we give way to those barriers and just don't come, or maybe we come, but we come reluctantly, eyes squinted with a look on your face that says, "Don't talk to me until after I've had another cup of coffee or two." It's hard to push down our sinful nature that tries to drag us back into bed and get to us forget about all this God's Word and church and stuff.

But you made it here, to the mountain of the Lord's temple. Then you take a look around and you start a running list in your head of the people who are not here. You start counting the people who used to come but don't anymore. There's a damper on your worship. Isaiah foretold that people would stream to the Lord's temple. Where are they? Did I do something wrong? Did I not shower or something and that's keeping people away?

It's an easy trap to look around and count all the people who aren't here who you think should be here and then get depressed about it. Whenever I start to think that way, I remember a quote from another pastor that goes something like, "Stop whining over the people who didn't come on Sunday and be grateful that anyone showed up to listen to you share God's Word." That comment corrects my attitude and moves me to be thankful that anyone shows up, but at the same time I want the nations streaming up the mountain of the Lord's temple, streaming to come worship our God.

What should we do to make this happen? When will we get this picture of people streaming into church, inviting others to come with them, them coming looking forward to hearing God's Word and learning it? Isaiah says that this will happen in the last days. Isaiah saw the last days as being when the Messiah, the Christ, would come to earth and those last days would continue up to the Last Day of earth, until Judgement Day. We are very much living in the last days that Isaiah foresaw. We should see people streaming up the mountain of the Lord to his house, his temple.

And you know what? I do see it happening. I see it as you invite your family and your friends essentially saying, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” “Come, let’s learn God’s Word.” “You don’t know what church is all about? Come with me. Come check out one of our services.” “You want to know what our worship is like? Let me pull up last Sunday’s service on Youtube for you. Check it out. Want to come with me?” You take with you the Christmas postcards and put them in your cubicle or on your desk, maybe on your front door. You hand them out to people you know. Maybe you even drop one off at your neighbor’s house. In my household, we pray for God to stream people up his mountain and to his house to worship him. I pray this with my boys on Saturday nights at bedtime. I pray that he would bring all of us back and many others to come and hear what God has done for them. Just a couple of weeks ago, my oldest added to the prayer with a big grin on his face, “God, bring a thousand people to church!” When we do these things, we are the fulfillment of this vision that God gave to Isaiah. When we do these things, we walk in the light of the Lord.

We have such a wonderful message to share with people, to invite them to hear, to have them come streaming to hear it. We have a message of peace for them. Not a worldly peace won through treaties and diplomatic relationships. No, we have a peace with God. He has judged us, judged us on the basis of what the promised Savior, his Son, came to do. As God said in the previous chapter of Isaiah, “Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18) We are at peace with God. Although our sinful nature may still try to battle him, he’s declared the victory won. When the sinful nature pops in and tries to convince us not to go up to the mountain of the Lord, to not go up to church, we remember that God has changed me. Though my sins were like scarlet, they are now as white as snow because God has forgiven me through the perfect life and death of Jesus Christ.

This peace of God that we have because he made us clean by the forgiveness of sins means that we also have peace with one another. “He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.” (verse 4) That means that when we see each other here at church, we let the anger go. We remember that we are here to hear the peace of God, and his peace with us means that I have peace with the other people who are here with me. We stream to the mountain of the Lord with the peace of forgiveness for each other.

This peace as we come together as brothers and sisters in Christ, this peace we have when we come to the mountain of the Lord, when we come to church, is a little preview of what is yet to come. Although Isaiah’s vision finds fulfillment in every single person who comes to our church, to every single person who goes to church across the world – and there are about 63 million who go to church every single Sunday in the US alone – we are starting to see that the mountain of the Lord’s temple is established as the highest of the mountains. People from all nations all over the world are streaming to the Lord’s house to hear his Word, to be taught his ways, to learn how to walk in the light of the Lord. God’s Word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. He gives us the encouragement to want to come to church, to be surrounded by that peace that God gives us knowing that our sins have been turned as white as snow. This peace makes us want to invite others to this mountain of the Lord so that they can stream to this message.

Coming to church is a little slice of heaven, a partial fulfillment that looks ahead to the day when all nations will stream up the mountain of the Lord. It is an imperfect one. We know that we are tempted not to come, to blow off church in favor of doing other things. We know that other people fall to that same temptation as we look around and don’t see them here today. But the day is coming when all nations will stream to the mountain of the Lord. On the Last Day when Christ returns, we will be one big church family. There will be no disputes. There will be no battles. We and all believers will be united with Christ as one Church.

In the meantime, though, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Let us encourage one another to keep coming to church, to keep hearing that peace that God has won for us, that though our sins are like scarlet they are as white as snow because God has forgiven us. Let us continue to get our kids up in the morning no matter how loud they groan about getting up on a Sunday morning. Let us continue to invite our family, our friends, our neighbors to come to the mountain of the Lord and check out the peace that we have. As we continue to do this, we will see more and more of God’s vision given to Isaiah be fulfilled until that very Last Day when Christ unites all believers as one Church on the mountain of the Lord. Amen.