

Wednesday in the Last Week of the Church Year 28 November 2001
Kramer Chapel CTS Fort Wayne, IN

JUDGMENT: NOW & THEN
Hebrews 12:22-29

+*Jesu Juva*+

“And he will come again to judge both the living and dead” so we confess in the creed. This last week of the church year puts us in mind of that judgment which is indeed coming. In the face of that future, the holy writer to the Hebrews speaks to us now: “See that you do not refuse Him who speaks.”

God spoke to Israel at Sinai in cloudy majesty and smoky awe. His voice caused the earth to quiver. The peal of thunder, the fiery flashes of lightening, the blast of the trumpet were not a sound and light show designed to draw seekers to Sinai. *Deus Abconditus* is not an amusement park deity domesticated for tourists who want a religious experience. This is no *mysterium tremendum* that can be analytically studied and classified by scholars and safely tucked away on a library shelf. No at Sinai, there is the God whose words kill. The children of Israel were terrified by the law, awestruck by the sovereignty of God whose voice booms down from the craggy peaks of the holy mountain. But they refused the voice of the Lord. They did not obey the Lord who spoke. The Book of Exodus records the sad tale of Israel’s rejection of the voice of the Lord. She complained about the rigors of life in the wilderness. Then, when God gave her manna from the bounty of His goodness, Israel grumbles. Israel wants something novel so she institutes her own alternative worship program featuring a golden calf. Yahweh’s substance; Canaanite style. It was culturally relevant idolatry at its very best. But idolatry it was and such idolatry ends in death. Sinai’s law unerringly sniffs out sin, uncovering our failure to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. It unmask all pious pretensions. Sinai is deadly. There is no life at Sinai. There are no crevices in that mountain that will hide us from the Judge of all. There are no caves deep enough to shelter us from the wrath of God’s law.

Hebrews tells us of another mountain. “You have come to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Jerusalem was the place of the temple where God located His name and His presence. But the temple to which we have come is the temple of Jesus’ flesh. It is through His flesh

that we have access to God. It is in Him that we are partakers of all that our text describes. Where Christ Jesus is, there is His church in heaven and on earth. We are with the Lord and therefore with His saints and angels. That is why the liturgy announces that we come to Christ's Supper with angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven. In this holy assembly, we hear the word of the Judge but it is not a sentence of guilt and condemnation. Rather it is the word of Absolution. That verdict of the Last Day that slips out ahead of time as through the mouth of the Lord's servant we are declared not guilty. We are with Jesus the liturgist our salvation who is both Priest and Victim. By His blood, the blood of the New Testament shed on the cross and given in the chalice for us to drink, our sin is consumed and we are rendered clean. Indeed the blood of the New Testament bespeaks better things than Abel's blood for the blood of the Innocent One who died in our stead proclaims peace and pardon.

Where is this Mount Zion, this heavenly Jerusalem of which Hebrews speaks? It is here as the Jesus' faith-creating words are proclaimed giving consolation to broken sinners. It is here as water is comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word, sprinkled on Josiah Donn Ohlman, washing away his sin, giving him the Holy Spirit, and enrolling him in the church of the firstborn. It is here as Christ's body and blood are given us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins. Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem is not only in the future. It is here now for the Lord who will come at the end, openly and unveiled to human sight, is here with His words and with His body and blood. Therefore, to use the apt words of one theologian, "we come to the Lord's Table as though we were going to our death so that when we go to our death, we may go as though we are going to the Lord's Supper."

So the exhortation given in Hebrews, "See that you do not refuse Him who speaks" is directed to our ears in these waning days of the church year. To refuse Him who speaks, is to be left with only the frightening terror of sins unforgiven and the heat of God's wrath. To refuse the free gifts of Mt.Zion is to be left in captivity to the demands of Sinai. But you have come to Mt.Zion. You have citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem. You are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken from a King who made the cross his throne and now lives and reigns to us as your Brother and Savior. See that you do not refuse Him for His words are spirit and they are life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.