

"The Great Transition"

Text: Hebrews 12:18-24

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. ^{ESV}(Jude 1:24-25)

Dear Fellow Christians, we are told that foreigners routinely think of the average American as "soft." We bristle at this, by if by "soft," they are talking about growing up without most third-world hardships, most of us would obviously qualify. We don't have to tote our water by the bucket or burn animal dung in our hut or cave to survive. In fact, a compelling argument could be made that, unlike previous generations, most hardships we face today involve dealing with problems of our own manufacture. We eat too much, drink too much, buy too much, worry too much, over-medicate, and don't get enough exercise or sleep. The inevitable result is that we make problems for ourselves and thereby manufacture our own "hardships."

One observation of Americans that is probably more accurate than not is that we tend to be less familiar with fear than citizens of many other countries. They're not talking about relatively minor things, like fear of the dark or being "traumatized" by some ridiculous horror movie. They are referring to the fact that most of us have never known the sheer terror of things that typically don't happen here. We have access to every known medicine if we get sick. We've never experienced the invasion of an enemy army or the resulting slaughter or deprivation. We've never known the fear of starvation, the heartbreak of civil war, or the terror of genocide. In fact Americans tend to get downright indignant whenever we do experience fear.

All of this tells us that we will also probably have a difficult time relating to the great transition identified in our text for this morning. No one here has ever seen or experienced such a thing – the terrible spectacle of God's wrath over against sin and rebellion. No one here has ever witnessed the righteous anger of the Living God. Yet if we are to rightly understand and appreciate the central message of our text for this morning, we need to be able to do just that. We need to put ourselves at the foot of that terrible mountain cloaked in gloom, smoke, fire, and tempest – a sight that made even Moses tremble with fear, the very man who knew God so intimately. There you and I need to stand for a time this morning, and there we need

to know true, raw, fear – if we are to fully appreciate the great transition that has taken place.

Carry yourself there then this morning. Hear the terrible sounds, see the sights, experience that first fear. Only by doing so will we gain the full import of this message from our God in our text for this morning, found in the New Testament Book of Hebrews, the Twelfth Chapter:

^{ESV} ***Hebrews 12:18-24 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ 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, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.***

This is God's Word. What a blessing to know that the Author of these words is God himself, and that their value is therefore beyond calculation. With absolute confidence in the origin and truthfulness of these words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Did you feel the fear that is meant to be portrayed by the opening words of our text? Probably not. Not really. Imagination can never do justice to reality. Yet we need to understand where we have been - our past and what it was really like - if we are to have an accurate appreciation for where we are now, and where we will be in the future. All depends on recognizing where we once were in our relationship with the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth – the One True Living God.

It's easy to be superficial here, isn't it? We tend to think: *"Oh, sure, we've sinned, and God doesn't like sin, but..."* There's always that "but" – that awareness that the payment for sin has already been made and that you and I already stand forgiven and beloved in God's sight. While that's obviously the very best news imaginable, even that news tends to dull over time when we fail to return in our minds to the way things

really used to be. When we fail to acknowledge the utterly terrifying position into which we were born, when we existed as God's enemies and knew nothing of his grace and mercy. We can't really know the joy and relief of who and what we are without first remembering who and what we used to be.

This is one of the things that the Book of Hebrews does so well. It takes pictures from Jewish history and uses them to make beautiful, divinely inspired contrasts and comparisons to the lives of New Testament Christians. Yet it is important to note that the Book of Hebrews doesn't make up these contrasts; it points out what is there, what already exists but that we often miss. Our text for today pictures the progress of the Children of Israel from Mt. Sinai to the Promised Land, and eventually to Mount Zion, the location of their capital and temple in Jerusalem. The application is that this is also a picture of you and me as we progress from where we were to where we are, and finally to where we will be – from death to life to life eternal.

When God established the Jewish race through Abraham, he made it clear from the beginning that this was to be a people and a religion based on faith rather than works; a nation whose comfort was to be centered on the promise of a faithful, yet unseen, God. This was therefore a people and a religion "set apart" from the idol worship that had captured the hearts of the rest of mankind. To this end (and as a telling example) no child was given to Abraham according to the normal course of life. Instead he was given the *promise* of a child after he and his wife had long passed the normal childbearing age. By faith Abraham and Sarah were to accept this promise, just as by faith they were to trust in God's promise that *the* Savior would be born centuries later from their own bloodline.

Yet God knew this people. He knew that they would be infuriatingly stubborn and rebellious. He knew that this people, if left to their own devices, would carry itself into spiritual destruction. God therefore gave them a stern and fierce master to keep them from self-destructing before the time set for the promised Savior to appear. This harsh, unsmiling nanny we know as the Mosaic Law, first given in written form on Mt. Sinai to Moses as he led this people from Egypt to the land that God had prepared for them.

From its very introduction, the Law terrified the Children of Israel, and this is the setting in which we need to imagine ourselves this morning. The spectacle must have been both terrifying and awesome – darkness, gloom, smoke, fire, tempest, and noise. With thunder and blaring trumpet blasts and the terrifying voice of God, the Law was given.

This was the fierce taskmaster that was put in charge of God's chosen people to keep them in line until the Savior could be born. There was, and is, nothing kind and loving about this cold, unyielding master. The Law offers neither encouragement nor comfort. It does not console us when we have done wrong, does not forgive us when we have erred, does not pick us up when we have fallen. It only accuses, threatens, and then punishes all who disobey. It never softens, never lightens our load, never offers help, never gives in. It is rigid, strict, unwavering, and – when you and I finally come to really understand it – it is absolutely terrifying. Not because God's Law failed us, but because we failed God's Law.

And this was also *your* keeper, your master. Each one of us was placed under its control when we were conceived and born. Not the Mosaic Law, but God's moral law. Every man, woman and child who has been **"born of a woman"** has also thereby been **"born under the law."** Remember, God's law knows nothing of kindness, gentleness, or forgiveness. It offers two options, and two options only: 1. Obey *perfectly*, or, 2. Suffer the punishment. The only punishment it knows is death. That means that from the moment we came into this world our soul could know not one moment's rest or peace. Always there was sin on our part, and always there was condemnation from God's Law. What is more, there was nothing we could do to free ourselves from the domination and curse of that Law. As sinners, we tried everything to escape the Law's iron grip. We tried turning to other gods. We tried denying that God even existed. We tried to satisfy what the Law was demanding of us by "being good." Nothing ever satisfied either the guilt of the heart or the nagging condemnation of the mind. Each time we fell into sin we heard the clear and ringing condemnation of God's Law. We tried to "do our best," yet an honest evaluation led us always to admit that obeying the law *part of the time* would do nothing to satisfy the perfection demanded by the Law *every single time*.

That was where we were, but that is not, thank God, where we are now. A great transition has taken place, for now, our text says, **"we have come to Mount Zion"** - a much different mountain from Sinai and the Law. The Law has served its purpose, for it was **"placed in charge to carry us along until Christ (came)."** (Galatians 3:24) We have come to a much different place, for this new place is gentle, kind, and forgiving. We cannot touch this new place where our God has brought us, but not because of its threatening punishment. We cannot touch this "mountain" because this is a place seen now only with the eyes of faith. We have come to the **"heavenly Jerusalem, the city of**

the living God." The Greek term here - **"you have come"** - indicates that this is a place we will never leave. Here we have arrived and here we will stay. It speaks of a connection to our loving, merciful God that he will not break. It also assures us that there is nothing beyond or superior to this connection we now have with our God. The Christian faith is not a temporary fix for sin; it is a permanent solution. Where once we were God's enemies, awaiting only his eternal wrath and condemnation, now we stand holy and forgiven in his sight. There is then no truth or comfort that transcends this place *where we now stand*. We have been brought to a place of peace, comfort, safety, and forgiveness. Where once we lived in abject fear of death, now we have life – a life that will never end, though our surroundings must change.

Our text tells us as much, for it pictures that final destination to which we must travel. Again, the life we have been given remains, but our surroundings must change. Our text concludes by showing us images of heaven - **"innumerable angels in festal gathering... the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven... God, the judge of all... the spirits of the righteous made perfect... and Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant"** This is the heaven that our Savior has earned for us, and this is the place he has gone ahead to prepare for us.

Note especially how the word **"perfect"** here teaches us that there is nothing *beyond* this faith, this place. There is nothing nobler or better for which we ought to strive, for there is nothing beyond "perfect." What an amazing life we have been given! Who would ever want to return to the other place – to Mt. Sinai and the Law? Who would ever want to return to the condemnation, anxiety, oppression and fear of that place where the impossible demand of perfection is leveled against every single human being, and where eternal torment is promised for all who fall short? That's exactly what mankind chooses whenever he imagines that he can save himself through his works, his personal effort to keep the law and earn heaven for himself. Who would ever want to go back to that place?

Our text concludes by telling us that we have come **"to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."** You remember Abel, the righteous man killed by his brother Cain. The "word" spoken by Abel's blood was *"vengeance"* - revenge for his brother's sin. As the familiar Lenten Hymn put it: **"Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies..."** Do you also remember how that stanza concludes? **"But the blood of Jesus for our pardon cries."** The blood of the new covenant is Jesus' blood. Jesus was also murdered, yet though his blood was shed by sinful man, his blood cries out for *mercy* instead of revenge. In fact it is through the shedding of Jesus' blood (his life

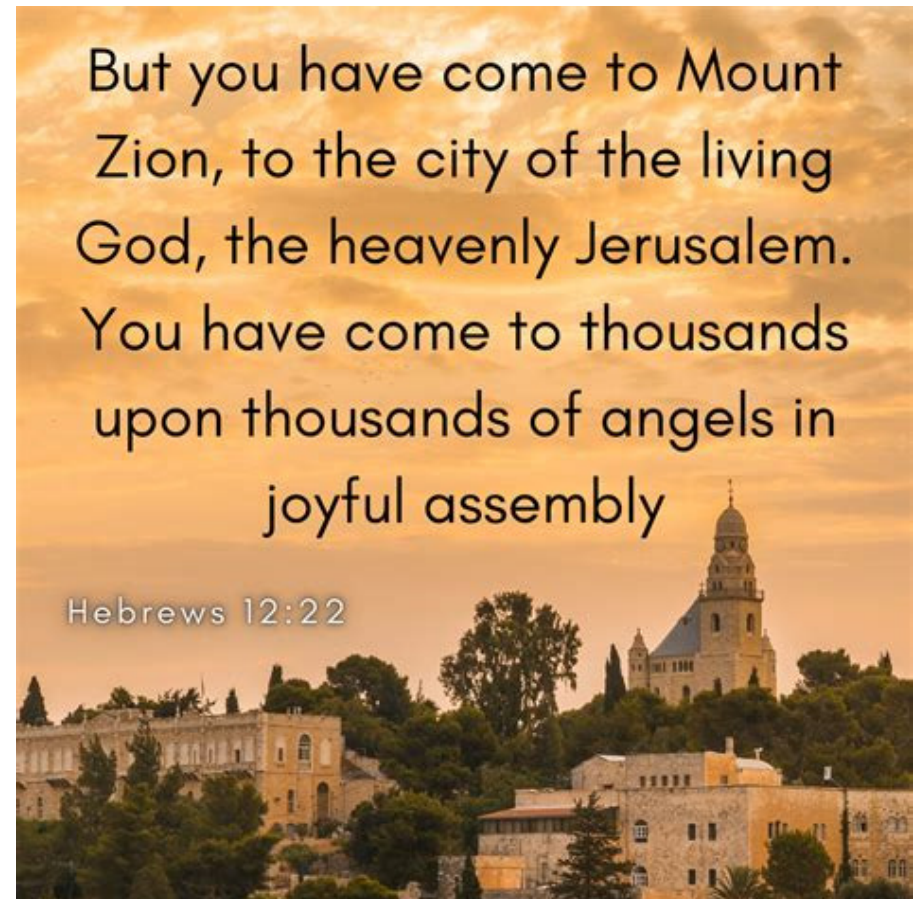
innocently given) that we have been brought to this *perfect place*; a place where peace and forgiveness reigns.

This is where we want to stay – in the peace and forgiveness that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ. So also therefore we pray: *Dear Father, remind us often of where we once were, and thereby also work to preserve each one of us in this saving faith which you yourself have created in our hearts. The place to which you have brought us is perfection, as we can now stand before your holy throne clean, pure, and without condemnation through faith in Jesus' righteousness. Preserve us, we pray, in this saving faith and carry us finally to our eternal existence in your glorious presence. Amen.*

ESV **Isaiah 66:18-24** "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, ¹⁹ and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. ²¹ And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD. ²² "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. ²³ From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD. ²⁴ ¶ "And they shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh."

ESV **Luke 13:22-30** He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. ²³ And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, ²⁴ "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' ²⁸ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. ²⁹ And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. ³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last."

ESV **Hebrews 12:18-24** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ 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, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 11th Sunday after Pentecost – August 24, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 136 (Blue Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now"

The Order of Service –Page 31ff. (Blue Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 66:18-24) As gentiles we really have no right to take for granted that the Lord Jesus also came to suffer and die for us. He had every right to reject all mankind and to seal us in the fate we have earned by our evil deeds. Yet great is his mercy toward *all* mankind, as we read in this lesson. Thanks be to God for his *undeserved* love, which he graciously extended to people of all races and nations.

Psalm 8 (Blue Hymnal Page 59) (Blue Hymnal page)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 13:22-30) In our Second Lesson, a man asks Jesus the same question that is still being asked today: "*Are only a few people going to be saved?*" We are often condemned for answering as Jesus answered: "***Many are invited, but few are chosen.***" Give thanks to God that, though millions die in unbelief, he has brought *you* to spiritual life through faith in Jesus Christ. Do not doubt the blessing that has been given to you. Rather resolve to share your faith, that others may enjoy eternal life with you.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Projected on Screens)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 161 (Blue Hymnal)

"All People That on Earth Do Dwell"

The Sermon – Text: Hebrews 12:18-24 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The Great Transition"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 502 (Stanzas 1-4) (Blue Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, You Have Prepared"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Blue Hymnal page 38)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Blue Hymnal page 41)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 142 (Blue Hymnal)

"On My Heart Imprint Your Image"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time.

A note on Communion: It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is the most intimate expression of the unity of faith and confessional fellowship. We therefore ask that only those who have publicly declared their unity of faith with us through membership in a CLC congregation approach the altar. Please speak to the pastor after the service for the information you would need and want before communing.

Attendance – Sunday (27) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service with Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News –Living Hope of Appleton, WI has called Pastor Ben Libby.

Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire, WI. Professor David Schaller has announced his resignation from the faculty of ILC. Mt. Zion of Detroit, MI will dedicate their new church property on Sunday, September 14, at 4:00pm. ILC will resume classes on Monday.

Church Calendar – A monthly church calendar is being prepared by Allison Loeb. We would like to include birthdays, anniversaries, baptism dates and other appropriate information of interest to our members. Please see the signup sheet on the mailbox table to submit this information.

Sunday School – We are looking for volunteers to teach this year's Sunday school, which is scheduled to resume on September 7th. Please see Pastor Roehl if you are willing and able to serve your Lord and his children in this way.