

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.”

¹⁵ When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, ¹⁶ and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. ¹⁷ To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. ¹⁸ Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24:12, 15-18)

Sermon Theme: God Invites You into His Glory

The teacher says, “Come here. I want to speak with you.” I wonder how many of us were less than excited to go over and talk to the teacher. Dad calls from another room in the house, “Get in here.” I’m sure many of us had the feeling of the bottom of our stomachs dropping out. Even when your spouse says in the sweetest, kindest voice, “Come here. I have something to tell you,” there’s still that cautious feeling in the back of our minds. Sometimes it’s a guilty conscience knowing you did something wrong and you are caught. Other times it’s the uncertainty of what’s about to happen. But it’s a different story when they want us to come closer to share something good. We feel differently when we know that it’s not because we are about to be in trouble. There’s maybe even a little skip in our step when we know they want us closer to share love and care.

I wonder what Moses is thinking when the Lord calls out to him and invites him up the mountain. After 400 years in slavery the people of Israel are finally going home. Along the way God stops them at this mountain, Mount Sinai. It’s here where God comes to his people to share what it means that they are His people. But they need to understand: no one comes up this mountain. Stones are set up as a boundary. Moses warns the people anyone who even touches the foot of the mountain will be stoned or shot with arrows. The message is clear: you cannot come up this mountain.

The people then gather around this mountain at a safe distance as God directs them. It’s then when they hear this other-worldly trumpet blast from the heavens. Thunder roars and the ground shakes. Smoke covers the mountain as the glory of Lord descends on the mountaintop. It truly is an amazing, awe-inspiring event. And it scares the people. The last thing they want to do is go up the mountain. They don’t even want to hear God speak directly to them. Some people have this air of authority that make us feel like the size of an ant when we are around them. For Israel it wasn’t just being star-struck. In the face of perfection, sinners are forced to see their own stain of sin. They know how they do not measure up and have no chance. It leaves them scared to death.

It may be difficult for us to really imagine what was going through minds of the people of Israel. After all, God doesn't come down on a mountain-top to speak to us. He doesn't appear as a fire consuming the bell-tower of our church. But he does come to us here in this church. This is God's House. So when you come to church do you have this awe and wonder that here God is with us? Do you have the reverence in your heart while you sing the hymns, follow along in the service, how you conduct yourself while here? Did you feel scared when you walked through those doors this morning? Probably not. And to a point, that's too bad. Part of it is we don't fear God and his holiness as much as we should. This also means we fail to appreciate our own sinfulness. If someone just killed another person, cheated on their spouse, went out and got black-out drunk last night, they would probably be a little cautious coming to church today. They would be more conscious of their sins. But what about you? We are quick to point out the open sins, while we ignore the grudges you refuse to let go, the cruel thoughts you have about someone, talking behind someone's back, your over-inflated pride, your self-loving self-serving heart. That makes you just as worthy kindling for God's consuming fire as the murderer, rapist, or cheater.

When the people of Israel see the glory of the Lord looking like a consuming fire eating the top of the mountain, they are scared. They know if they approach God on their own, they have as much chance of survival as a dry pine needle in a forest fire.

There's a little bit of that fire burning in your conscience. It burns you when you know you are doing something wrong. The problem is, we are very good at controlling that fire. We don't need too much help from the world around us to convince ourselves to downplay the seriousness of our sins.

But, try as we might, no matter how much you spray down God's Law and try to tame it with excuses, God's Law will not go out. Instead, it's more like adding fuel to the fire. God doesn't want to hear your excuses. It doesn't change his expectations. He doesn't need your excuses. He already knows why you did what you do. It's not just the action that condemns you. It's what you are: a sinner. And we have no business being in God's presence. In fact, no one can stand in God's presence seeing his face and live.

That is, without an invitation. Because God makes the rules, he can break them. And the only time he does that is when he is acting in grace. Moses does nothing to be worthy of this invitation. He was a murderer. He often doubts God. There was a point where God was ready to kill him! But here, at Mount Sinai, God invites a sinful man, Moses, to come up and stay with him. And because God invites him, there is nothing to fear.

God wants to have a relationship with his people. Although that sin keeps us from him, God works to bring mankind to him. And because God invites you, there is nothing to be afraid of when you come to his house. Yes, we want to have this awe and wonder when we come to church because this is God's house and He's here with us. There should be some special reverence while we are in His presence. But, there's nothing for us to be afraid of because invites you and wants you to be with him.

But this same God does not just want a relationship with us here on this earth. He wants you to be with him forever in the glorious perfect life without sadness, sickness or pain. But before the glory, there's struggle. For Moses in Exodus, he waits in the cloud for six days. With every passing hour all sorts of questions and doubts probably came to his mind. How quickly while waiting in the doctor's office and the time drags on that we wonder if it's worth coming in. I'm sure there were times when Moses considers going back down the mountain. I'm sure Moses needs to remind himself time and again what a privilege it was to be invited by God to come to Him.

What about you as you wait for God to call you to be home with him in heaven? Have you forgotten the privilege of coming to church? Instead maybe you are here because you have nothing else better to do. Maybe it's because you are expected to and obligated. Has the wonder and awe of God calling you his own child worn off? Have we forgotten the blessing and miracle that God works through His Word preached by his called servant, a pastor? Has hearing that your sins are forgiven lost its sweet sound? Has church and being in the Word lost some of its former glory? Maybe it's because of some struggle in life that distracts you. Maybe you are wrestling with a sin that's leading you to doubt God's love instead of leaning on it. It could be the uncertainty of the future that brings you to wonder if any of this is worth it. It just might be that there are other things you feel need to or would rather be doing. Maybe it's simply you aren't feeling it today.

Again, it's a failure of seeing our sinfulness. This time it's not struggling to fear God; it's a struggle to appreciate God's undeserving love. Because God wants you to be here. He doesn't have to invite you. It doesn't make his day better. You aren't doing him any favors. He's not someone at a party who needs you to be there to have a good time. But God still wants you to be there with him. We see how serious he is about that by going to another mountaintop. It's not the glory of the Mount of Transfiguration. No, it's a mountain of horror. We see the worst miscarriage of justice. We see the cruelty of sinful mankind as they put another human being through the torture of crucifixion. We see mankind's nastiness as they abuse physically, mentally, emotionally.

But it's here on Mount Calvary where Jesus works to bring you closer to God. It's there on that cross where he breaks down the boundary stones of sin keeping you from approaching God. With the shedding of his blood, Jesus is clearing a safe passage so that you might approach God's throne with confidence. He passes through the fires of hell so that they will not touch you. Hanging on that cross between God in heaven and you on earth, Jesus shields you from God's wrath and burning anger. Jesus is burned so that you might be safe. Neither the cruelty of man nor the divine justice of God would snuff out the fire of his love. But for the joy of bringing you closer to him, Jesus endures the cross and its shame. He suffers so you have peace with God. He's wounded so that you would be healed. He's abandoned so that you would be welcomed. He dies so you will live. He endures the cross because he knows the crown that awaits him and that he is earning for you.

And you know the end of the story. Three days later we go to the tomb where his lifeless body should be. But Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Payment for sins was made, accepted, and forgiveness is won. We know because Jesus lives! And that living Savior Jesus returns to heaven where he rules with all power and authority.

This same Jesus wants you to be with him. But he doesn't wait for you to choose it, decide, or accept it on your own. He knows we couldn't. So he sends the Holy Spirit to create faith your heart. And it's through that faith you receive Jesus' forgiveness and life. This Spirit-worked faith grabs on makes it your own. Jesus doesn't leave you at the foot of the mountain. He wants you to be with him in the eternal glory of heaven. He's been getting it ready for you since before the creation of the world.

But before the glory, comes the struggle. So, God invites you to be with him at this mountain here in worship to help us in our struggle. Here in church the glory of Lord is hidden, but we see it with eyes of faith. The glory of the Lord is hidden there at the baptismal font where God invites dead sinners to come closer to him. With the water and Word he makes you alive and new creations. It's here hidden in the Word where we hear the Father speak. We listen to Jesus' voice. He assures us he is well-pleased with his Son. As the Father's children that means he is well-pleased with you. The glory of Lord is hidden, right there, in the bread and wine where Jesus invites you to come closer to him. There with the bread and wine, you receive Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and strength as we push ahead to that crown of glory. The next we meet will be on Ash Wednesday. There we begin our own forty-day time period where God invites us to be with him. We know that we are not worthy to be in his presence. But we know the rest of the story. So we fight on knowing that in Jesus we have the crown of eternal life. Amen.