



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, August 21-27 (C) – Hebrews 12:18-29

Focus: *Acceptable Worship with Reverence and Awe*

word of life

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe....” (Hebrews 12:28 NRSV)

Read Hebrews 12:18-29

The writer of Hebrews uses soaring words to inspire and encourage Jewish Christians. The twelfth chapter of Hebrews begins with the image of a cheering crowd of witnesses supporting believers who are running the race of faith with perseverance. (See Hebrews 12:1.) The heroes of faith and Jesus are examples of those who have kept the faith. Through their example, we are encouraged to remain steadfast about living a faithful life with reverence and awe of God at work in Jesus Christ.

Since the Jewish Christians were well aware of how God worked through Moses, the writer of Hebrews contrasts Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. These words may or may not carry much punch today; but for the first century Jewish-Christian community, these mountains symbolized important aspects of God.

1. *What does the phrase “Jewish-Christian” mean in the context of the first century?*
2. *What events took place on Mount Sinai?*
3. *What do you know about Mount Zion?*

The Jewish Christians of the first century were well acquainted with the story of God working through Moses on Mount Sinai. This significant and sacred mountain is where Moses received the 10 Commandments from God. From then on, the people were to keep Mount Sinai holy. Take a moment to read the description of that event in Exodus 19-20. Note the vivid description of the mountain blazing with fire as the voice of God was heard. “Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently.” (Exodus 19:18 NRSV)

4. *Describe the Mount Sinai experience in your own words.*
5. *What tangible signs of God are associated with Mount Sinai?*

On Mt. Sinai, God gave the people statutes and ordinances to guide them as they lived in the land promised to Abraham. But Mt Sinai is to be understood as being more than the place where the law was given. It is also a place of theophany where God's presence was experienced – in smoke, fire, darkness, trumpet, and the sound of God's own voice. It is the place where the covenant was made.

On Mt. Zion (the other mountain referred to by the author of Hebrews), God's presence is also experienced in a new covenant. This is the location of the temple and the city of Jerusalem – a city established by God through David, a city claimed for God's heavenly and holy purposes. It is also the site of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the ultimate embodiment of God's presence.

6. *What is meant by the heavenly Jerusalem (or New Jerusalem)?*
7. *How does this use of geography bring the acts of God closer to home?*

With fire and might, God acted in Mt. Sinai in the Old Testament, but on Mount Zion, God tried something new. Our response to God is thanksgiving, “We offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.” (Hebrews 12:28 NRSV)

8. *How do these stories of Mt. Sinai and Mt Zion evoke awe in you?*

Word among us

Jimmy loved the word, “Awesome!” Ever since he was a little boy, Jimmy would embrace each day with an expectation of the awesome things and people he would encounter. If nothing else, he was consistent. His mother asked him to use another adjective to describe his food, the weather, or his friends, but he saw no reason to change the word when everything was “awesome!”

When Jimmy graduated from high school, he signed everyone’s yearbook with his signature word: “Awesome!” In return, his close friends signed Jimmy’s yearbook with a single word, “Awesome!” Nothing more needed to be said.

1. *Who does Jimmy remind you of?*
2. *What is it like to be around someone like Jimmy?*

The summer after graduation, Jimmy visited the Grand Canyon and was so awed by the view, he was left speechless. Not even the word “awesome” was sufficient for the beauty around him. That trip to the Grand Canyon started him on an inner journey of defining and re-defining “awesome”. His spiritual quest took him into the Bible. He became fascinated by the story of Moses who took off his shoes when he stood on sacred ground—ground that was sacred because he had encountered an awe-inspiring God.

3. *What are some things in your life which are truly “awesome”?*
4. *When have you experienced sacred ground?*

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe....” (Hebrews 12:28 NRSV) Mount Sinai and Mount Zion are geographical locations of great significance in the Bible. Both became sacred ground because of God’s activity in those places.

We are encouraged to offer to God an attitude of reverence and awe no matter where we find ourselves—on a mountaintop or valley. God is the one worthy of our praise and awe.

5. *What does it mean to offer to God an acceptable worship?*
6. *Define and describe “awe”.*
7. *Describe a time when you have experienced the awesomeness of God.*

faith practice

Hear God’s Word and share in the Lord’s Supper

Awesome! God is at work, calling us into a life of praise and thanksgiving. “See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking...” (Hebrews 12:25 NRSV) The voice of God no longer shakes the earth like on Mt. Sinai, but it clearly calls us in Christ to be part of a new covenant and to the heavenly Jerusalem. We are part of the body of Christ and a new creation. Awesome!

8. *How do you plan this week to listen and respond in awe to God?*

Prayer

Holy One, you alone are worthy of our praise. May you find our lives and our worship acceptable and pleasing to you. Amen

last word

Pause. Breathe. Be in awe.

Daily Faith Practices

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