

## Follow Jesus to Another Mountain

✠ Not of terror as on Sinai

✠ Joyful Zion beyond the cross

In the name of Jesus, our glorious Savior, dear family of God:

If you've ever travelled where you don't speak the language, you know how context and body language can reveal what's being said. In most churches in China without understanding a word besides "Jesu," you will sense messages heavy with Law. In registered churches or house churches the preachers mostly look angry. On this side of the ocean American churches forget the **Mountain** and drink sugar water in the swamps below. Chinese Christians are stuck on the wrong mountain, while American Christians try to make their own mountains with plastic shovels piling up dirt. Transfiguration is a great Sunday for this text from Hebrews 12. **Follow Jesus to Another Mountain.** This **Mountain** is...

✠ Not of terror as on Sinai

Like it or not, God's people have to go to Mount Sinai as surely as we need to go to the doctor now and then. Our humanistic view of our own self-worth says, "You're okay as long as you think I'm okay. Otherwise, I'm still sure I'm okay, but who knows about you?" Sinners don't realize this conceit against our neighbor is really aimed at God. For us to recover God must act.

At Mount Sinai God wanted to destroy hundreds of thousands of Israelites for worshipping the golden calf. But Moses pleaded for mercy, and the LORD's compassion spared them. By the time of our Old Testament Lesson (Exodus 34:29-35), things were better. Moses came down from Mount Sinai, but did not realize how God's glory lit up his face. Aaron and the Israelites ran away until Moses called them back. *"When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord."* (Exodus 34:33-35 NIV)

For a long time I thought that veil was to cover the brightness in order not to scare anyone. But the Holy Spirit explains through Paul in 2 Corinthians: *"...Moses...put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away."* (3:13 NIV) What God gave at Mount Sinai would not last. And it's good thing. Sinai was a terrifying mountain with no help for our souls.

Look at Mount Sinai on that dreadful day in our text when God first came down. Curiosity could have killed men and animals if the LORD had not commanded Moses to build a fence around the mountain. No one could even touch it without being stoned to death or shot full of arrows (Exodus 19:12f). Were the Israelites like kids sticking their tongue on a frozen flagpole? The mountain was full of smoke, burning with fire, darkness and gloom. God's trumpet blasted in a violent storm that must have shaken the ground. Even Moses had to admit he was trembling with fear. The people begged, "Don't let God do that again! You talk to Him. We'll listen to you, but the voice of God will kill us." (Exodus 20:18)

God wanted to keep them from sinning by giving them a glimpse of His holiness. Maybe you've felt it when thunder shook you from a deep sleep in a tent or in the attic as a kid. Fear will only go so far in stopping bad language and acting out sin. It cannot make your heart right with God or caring toward your neighbor. The Lord says through Paul to the Colossians: Rules like, *"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"...are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining*

*sensual indulgence.*” (Colossians 2:21f NIV) Kids who hear nothing but Law finally conclude, “What’s the use?” They give up trying. Naughty on purpose becomes the norm.

Remember that meeting I told you about a few years ago in Arizona? The pastor was away, so one elder took it upon himself to read a fire and brimstone sermon from the 1800’s. He said, “We need more of this in our churches.” Which is true if we never go to Sinai and drink only artificial sweetener. But when he turned to find out what I thought, I asked the people, “What was missing from that sermon?” The women were the loudest when everyone shouted, “Jesus!” They were so right. The sermon was stuck on Mount Sinai – fire and fear, darkness and death. This is why we started the Grace Bible Institute for China to share with thirsty souls the sweet water of life from **Another Mountain**, fresh and clear...

### ✝ Joyful Zion beyond the cross

Can you relate to Peter in our Gospel Lesson (Luke 9:28-36)? Let’s put up tents to live in the light of our Lord’s glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. Let’s walk and talk with Jesus and Moses and Elijah. I have so much to ask them. But that’s sleep walking with Peter. He did not listen to what the three were discussing. *“They spoke about [Jesus’] departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”* (9:31 NIV) Jesus was headed to the cross. He had to suffer death first before He could rise to glory on Easter and fill the world with the wonder of God’s love for all.

I can’t help wondering how many of our members will make the same mistake as Peter this year. Few of us miss Easter. It’s such a happy celebration. Besides, there’s breakfast. Who would miss Easter breakfast? But our feet sometimes tell a different story than our mouths. We sing praise to God, but fail to follow our suffering Savior first to Calvary before we **Follow Jesus to Another Mountain**.

Sundays in Lent remain “little Easters,” islands of refreshment during the season of our Savior’s Passion. But are you like the mountain climber with only one shoe? He cut off one pant leg and ripped off one of his sleeves. He left his hat and forgot one of his gloves. Everything was fine in the sunshine down below. But climbing into the wind at high altitude, he was unprotected from the storm. If you leave Midweek Lenten worship out of your schedule, you don’t realize the harm. Some have no choice. But as one professor told us: “You never know but that the service you skip may be when God wants to tell you one thing to save you so much grief and heartache, and ultimately save your soul.”

Look where we are. God brings us to **Joyful Zion beyond the cross**. *“You have not come to that smoking mountain,”* says the holy writer. *“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”*

After he was murdered by his brother Cain, *Abel’s blood for vengeance Pleaded to the skies; But the blood of Jesus For our pardon cries.* (CW 103:4) Jesus stands between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion to lead us all the way to the goal of God’s perfection. He bought us a place in glory with His holy, precious blood. God signed the deed for your mansion on **Another Mountain** when He raised Jesus from the dead. In God’s Word, the Bible, Jesus has planted green pastures beside quiet waters that restore your soul. He rejoices our hearts with full and free forgiveness in His New Covenant of pure grace. In His Last Will and Testament He has treasured up the free inheritance of His body and blood, *“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”* God’s one-sided New Covenant makes us new and sets the angels to singing with delight because God has done it all. God says about all of us sinners: *“Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.”* (Hebrews 10:17) In God’s forgetful forgiveness let us **Follow Jesus to Another Mountain**, the heavenly Jerusalem above. First to the cross, then to **Joyful Zion beyond the cross**. Meanwhile, with Jesus on the plain we eagerly serve God and our neighbor in holy joy. Amen.