

+ November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 + All Saints Sunday + Pr. John Petersen  
"A Beautiful Scene on a Beautiful Mountain"

Isaiah 25:6-9: "And in this mountain  
The LORD of hosts will make for all people  
A feast of choice pieces,  
A feast of wines on the lees,  
Of fat things full of marrow,  
Of well-refined wines on the lees.  
7 And He will destroy on this mountain  
The surface of the covering cast over all people,  
And the veil that is spread over all nations.  
8 He will swallow up death forever,  
And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces;  
The rebuke of His people  
He will take away from all the earth;  
For the LORD has spoken.  
9 And it will be said in that day:  
"Behold, this *is* our God;  
We have waited for Him, and He will save us.  
This *is* the LORD;  
We have waited for Him;  
We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

In the summer of 1944, my father's B-24 bomber was hit while attacking the train station in Munich. Having nursed the crippled plane as far as they could, the crew bailed out and the bomber crashed into a meadow high in the French Alps. All the American flyers were quickly rounded up by members of the French underground in that area, and a 7 week journey through the mountains began.

At one point, as they evaded the pursuing Nazis, the Americans were kept in a hide out near the peak of a mountain, overlooking the passes and valleys and roads below. From that perch high above, they could clearly see any danger approaching.

On one of our return visits with my Dad, the French arranged for a tractor to pull a wagon loaded with wine and champagne and caviar and roast beef and hams and pastries to that same hiding place. The picnic on the mountain top lasted most of the day. That memory is the image in my mind whenever I picture the scene described in our text for this All Saints Sunday. Because what Isaiah describes for us is A BEAUTIFUL SCENE ON A BEAUTIFUL MOUNTAIN. In describing this mountain top banquet, the prophet is really picturing the beauty of God's salvation which He offers us now, and which we will fully experience forever in heaven.

As we look at this scene from our text we see first that there in heaven a wonderful meal is being served. "On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine- the best of meats and the finest of wines." This sounds like the sort of feast we'd indulge in only once in awhile, on special occasions. Our doctors wouldn't recommend this sort of meal on a regular basis, but it sure sounds good.

And the Lord means it to sound good. He wants it to be something we anticipate with relish. He wants us to look forward to heaven and the joys awaiting the faithful ones who reside there forever. There all that could harm us will be absent as our redeemed and glorified and indestructible bodies will live in the Lord's presence. There, joys will never end.

What a beautiful picture! A feast on a spectacular mountain top. What a beautiful future the Lord holds out to us. But here's a sobering question: How could we expect to be the guests at such a banquet? The Psalmist asked, "Who may ascend onto the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place?" The answer: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." No amount of time with soap at the sink could clean our sin stained hands and purify our corrupt hearts. Rather than honored guests, we would more closely resemble homeless people who can only stand at the window and stare at the diners enjoying a meal in a fancy restaurant.

According to God's law, that's what our condition would be. "Your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden His face from you." Our sins would keep us far from the mountain top and the feast offered there.

But thankfully, in preparing us for the mountain feast in heaven, the Lord makes sure to feed us with the Gospel here below. He makes us ready for the banquet by washing us in baptism and He continually nourishes that baptism faith by speaking His word to us and giving us the sacrament of His Son's Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. As we taste and see that the Lord is good, receiving His forgiveness and life in the Gospel, we are given a foretaste of the banquet now being enjoyed by our believing loved ones in heaven.

This feast on the mountain is not a private affair intended for members only. It's a "feast for all peoples." In describing the same thing, Jesus once said, "Many will come from the east and the west and take their places at the banquet." The Bible is clear - God wants all to be saved. Those kept from the feast are those who rejected it by their own unbelief. Still God wants everyone to attend the royal feast above and to partake in the abundance of the good things prepared for those in heaven. So Jesus tells us, "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all creation." In that Gospel we hear and share, God Himself has promised to come to

us and be with us and lavish on us His rich menu of pardon, peace, strength and hope.

As we ponder this beautiful scene on a beautiful mountain we see 2<sup>nd</sup>, that there perfect knowledge is revealed. "On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations." By nature we are enfolded in a covering. We live here in a deep, foggy valley, where our sins have blinded us to the truth. We stumble and fall in the darkness. Jeremiah described this: "There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."

The veils which blind us are of our own making. God's word is a clear light which shows us the only way to heaven. So if our hearts are dark, the fault is ours, not God's. But whenever the Holy Spirit turns someone's heart to rely on the Lord, that covering is pulled back so that he sees and trusts the truth.

Here our enlightenment is not perfect. Paul wrote, "Now we see but a poor reflection; then we will see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known." In heaven, though, everything that obstructs our view will be taken out of the way. All the mysteries we can't understand will be cleared up and we will see forever.

Until then, the Lord invites us to His church, where His word and sacraments are found and used. Through them our eyes are made wide open so that we can view eternity, and the Lord who guides us will never lead us astray.

Look at this beautiful sight on a beautiful mountain. 3<sup>rd</sup>, we see, there all sadness is removed. "He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces, He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth."

We must always be careful when poison is nearby, especially to make sure that children can't reach it. We're more at ease when the poison has been removed. Jesus swallowed the poison of sin on our behalf. What a bitter and terrible cup He hoisted on our behalf. He stepped forward and took away death itself by swallowing it for us.

Now on the mountain top, all crying has ended. Jesus has removed the pain and sorrow which caused our tears to flow. He places before us instead the Gospel of His life, death and resurrection for us. By His death and rising, the last terrible enemy has been vanquished. Since sin has been removed by Jesus, so too, death has been swallowed up forever. "Where, O death, is your victory, Where O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." His Easter victory means that our graves will not be our permanent residence. All who die believing

in Him will rise at the summons of His voice on the last day to enter life eternal in heaven.

This is the promise we hold in our heart. Now we must accept this by faith. Here we live in the valley of sorrow and under the shadow of death. Here death seems so permanent and the loss it brings seems so permanent. It's only natural that our eyes are filled and overflowing as we experience the grief of losing a loved one. But the Lord dries our tears with the assurance that the soul of a Christian lives on with Him, even as the body dies. "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."

Now we trust that all this is true. But when Jesus comes back on the last day we will realize first hand the full extent of this promise. Isaiah concludes, "And it will be said in that day: 'Surely, this is our God: we trusted in Him and He saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted Him, let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation!'"

Because we know our sins, here on earth we feel a natural dread of death. But keep in mind this beautiful scene on a beautiful mountain. One day we will join our voices with the happy throng now praising God in heaven.

Until that day, come and partake of the rich feast He places before - His word and sacraments bringing to us Jesus and all His gifts. Being well fed here, one day in heaven we will feast His side, and will never leave. Amen.