

### Go to God's Mountain!

According to the 2,300-year-old story, Damocles worked for King Dionysius on the island of Sicily. Dionysius was rich and powerful because he attacked many places and made many enemies. One day Damocles complained that the king had life so good. He lived in a palace and ate wonderful meals every day. In response, the king offered Damocles the chance to be king for a day, which he quickly accepted. Damocles sat on the king's throne amid embroidered rugs, fragrant perfumes, and the service of beautiful attendants. But above the throne, the king put a deadly sword hanging by a single hair of a horse's tail. The king was making the point that although he enjoyed many luxuries, he could never really relax. He never knew when an enemy would attack or if someone would betray him. It did not take long before Damocles walked away and did not want to be king anymore. He could not stand having a deadly sword hanging over his head knowing that it could drop at any instant and kill him.

I think that all of you can appreciate how Damocles felt. We want to enjoy life, and there is a lot to enjoy, but there's always plenty to be concerned about; the election, inflation, schoolwork, job, health, retirement issues, our children, our parents, our grandchildren, and on and on. Will a loved one die soon? Will I die soon? Like Damocles we have the "sword of death" hanging over us and we can not escape it. Isaiah talks about (:7), "**the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations.**" Think of a murder mystery on TV. When someone is dead, a sheet, a shroud, is pulled over their face. The shroud of death covers over all people, all nations. We will all, one day, die.

To comfort us as we face death, Isaiah points us to a "**mountain.**" In verses six and seven, he says, "**On this mountain.**" This mountain is Mt. Zion. Literally, Mt. Zion is a mountain in Judea on which the city of Jerusalem is built. In Jerusalem was the temple where God appeared to his people and where God's people worshiped him. Mt. Zion is also where Jesus was crucified and rose again to save the whole world. Throughout the Bible, Mt. Zion is a metaphor for wherever God meets with his people with the message of salvation. That means that Mt. Zion is right here. You are on the top of the mountain right now. This is where God comes to us through his Word and sacraments. This is where we meet Jesus. So

when the dagger of death troubles us, Isaiah encourages us to "Go to God's Mountain."

### Jesus gives us a foretaste of the heavenly wedding banquet

Isaiah explained that although the shroud of death covers all people, the promised Messiah, Jesus, the Savior, will (:7) "**destroy the shroud.**" When Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried Jesus, they placed a cloth, a shroud, over his face. On Easter morning, when Peter and John ran to the tomb, they saw that the cloth, that shroud over his face, was folded up and set aside. Jesus removed the shroud of death just as Isaiah said would happen. Because Jesus, your Savior and substitute, rose from the dead, you also will rise and live forever with a glorified body. On that mountain, on Mt. Zion, Jesus destroyed death.

Heaven is often described as a wedding banquet. What a joyful time it is when family and friends rejoice with the newly married couple. Isaiah describes salvation as the most magnificent meal you could ever imagine. Verse 6, "**On this mountain [Mt. Zion] 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.**" Eating that banquet will be our eternal joy in heaven. But while we are on this earth, Jesus gives us a foretaste of the heavenly wedding banquet. Jesus gives you the love, acceptance and security that we are starving for. No matter what your sin, no matter how embarrassing, no matter how bad, no matter how secret, no matter how often, he will not stop loving you. He loved you to death, his death on the cross and your sins – past, present and future – are already forgiven. Jesus paid for the banquet of salvation with his life.

We are not in heaven yet, that's for sure, but we already rejoice in the foretaste of heaven that we have now. Every time you hear the message of salvation – that your sins are forgiven and you are going to heaven – you are enjoying another bite of that banquet. Every time you come to the Lord's Supper, Jesus reaches through the invisible curtain separating heaven and earth with his body and blood and gives you a taste, an appetizer of the banquet waiting for you. When you hear of your salvation, when you partake of the Sacred Supper, you are at one with God and all your sins are forgiven, just like it will be forever in heaven.

Think of today's Gospel reading. Jesus was heartbroken and cried at the grave of his friend Lazarus. But then Jesus replaced that sorrow and sadness with life and resurrection. Death turned into life. Tears turned into celebration. Through that account, Jesus is giving us a picture, a

foretaste, of what will one day happen to our bodies. Jesus has power over death. For those connected to Christ, death is not the end. Even though we are not in heaven yet, we have comfort as we mourn the death of loved ones. We have peace even though the dagger of death is hanging over us.

Jesus will give us a full taste of the heavenly wedding banquet

There will, of course, come a time when we do close our eyes in death. One member on her death bed asked me what it's like to die. I told her, "It's like closing your eyes to take a nap. While you are sleeping, you are not aware of the passage of time. Then you open your eyes and you're awake and feeling refreshed and happy. When you open your eyes in heaven, you'll see Jesus face to face with all of your loved ones standing behind him eager to greet you. Your happiness will never end. You have nothing to fear."

When we eat a meal here on this earth, even a lavish wedding banquet, we will get hungry again in a while. The banquet of salvation satisfies us fully and forever when we die. Jesus will give us a full taste of the heavenly wedding banquet. Isaiah explained (:8), "**[The LORD Almighty] 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. The LORD has spoken.**" It is certain! The Apostle John also explained what we could look forward to in heaven in the book of Revelation (21:3,4), "**God himself will be with them. ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**" Anything that makes you sad or weary on this earth, will not be in heaven. Constant, unending happiness, health, and joy. It is impossible for our mortal minds to fully grasp what it's going to be like.

When the dagger of death troubles you, go to the Lord's mountain and be reminded of the heavenly wedding banquet waiting for you. This weekend, we are commemorating the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the start of St. Matthew. I have often said that the purpose of this church is to help people through life on earth to eternal life in heaven. Since I have been here, I have presided over more than 50 funerals. Dozens of people who once sat where you are sitting are now rejoicing in heaven. They are home free from sin and guilt, sorrow and sadness forever. In my pastor's report, I do not list them as "dead." I list them as, "transferred to heaven." Slowly but surely, one by one, St. Matthew is being transferred to heaven. We are happy for those already there and look forward to the day when we

get to join them. This church is the mountain of the Lord, Mt. Zion, where God meets with us and we worship him along with those who have gone before us. When we sing our praises to God, we are singing with them again even though we can't see or hear them. When we take the Lord's Supper, we are dining with them again. Isaiah explained (:9), "**In that day [when the promised Messiah comes to complete salvation] they [the believers] will say, 'Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.'**" To which we reply, "Amen! Even so, Lord Jesus, quickly come. Come and take us home where we will enjoy the full taste of the heavenly wedding banquet forever." Amen.