

August 24, 2025

Isaiah 66:22-23; Hebrews 12:18-29

“A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The day of Jesus' return cannot be predicted. The day is drawing near. Paul wrote to Christians in the first century in Romans 13:11-14, "... the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light ... make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." There is no room for self-indulgent scheming that nourishes sinful appetites. The apostles and the ancient Christians were to live with the expectation that Christ's return was imminent, approaching. We should live the same way! Life down here is shaky! Like them, we are looking for **A Kingdom That Cannot be Shaken!**

The worst earthquake in recorded history was the Valdivia earthquake on May 22, 1960. It measured a staggering 9.5 magnitude and caused widespread destruction across Chile, Japan, Hawaii, and Southeast Australia. The earthquake resulted in over 1,655 fatalities and left more than 2 million people homeless. The tsunami generated by the quake also caused significant damage, with waves reaching nearly 100 feet in Honshu, Japan. This event is a stark reminder of the devastating impact of earthquakes and the need for robust disaster preparedness and response strategies.

According to one author there are seven ways that Earthquakes affect humans. There is loss of life. Society is interrupted with the destruction of homes, places of work, schools, churches and so forth. People suffer traumatic injuries. There is post traumatic stress in people. The economy is disrupted and sometimes devastated. The environment is altered. And others who come to help suffer as well.

To me an earthquake serves as a picture of life down here. Everyday of our lives we are touched by things that shake us to our core and show that we live in a world that can easily be shaken. When someone we love dies it is like an earthquake. Devastating things happen that turn our lives upside down in every institution that exists. Injuries and old age change the way in which we see things and function. We have anxiety over so many things that we can hardly think in our nervousness. Everyday we feel like the economy is going to tank and our livelihood with it. And the natural disasters we see remind us of how our earth is wearing out just like the Lord predicted that it would. And the people who are attached to us and try to help are caught up in the troubles with us.

All of these things that I have mentioned can shake our faith. These things can even cause us to doubt God and to question whether he cares. But there is even more to this shaking that can be said from a spiritual perspective. Our epistle lesson for this morning says: "See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven." The writer is talking about the shaking on the mountain of Sinai and referring to the spiritual agitation that resulted from his warning. All the sudden we begin to see that everything that we have talked about so far, our life down here and our spiritual walk with God, are subject to shaking. The writer to the Hebrews warns us to heed the warning. If we do not listen, there will be no escape from the final shaking when the Lord God returns to judge the living and the dead.

The earthquakes in our lives and the spiritual shake-ups that we experience in the speaking of God are all designed to help us to see what this place has become, and why we do not want to remain here. We may appreciate this creation and all that God is doing in it, regardless of the fall into sin. But the idea that this is our home makes no sense. Our rebellion against God has caused the earthquakes of our lives, both physically and spiritually. When the people of Israel came to the mountain of Sinai they had come to a place that could not be touched. The writer to the Hebrews says that they had come to a place of “blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’”

What we discover here is that the earthquake of God and his word, that shakes everything, is designed to shake us up in such a way that we might be emptied of everything down here and any notion that we can save ourselves or stay here endlessly. The quaking makes that plain and prepares us for the great gift of God in his Son. All the quaking leads us to desire a place that no longer quakes. The Lord causes our hearts to tremble, as it did for Moses on the mountain, to prepare us to meet God in a different way, or on a different mountain. The writer to the Hebrews says: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

The most important point of the text is that we have come to Jesus and the new covenant, which is a sprinkled blood that speaks a word that our salvation has been fulfilled. This is a better word than Abel, who was willing to die for the offering of his sacrifice by the hands of his brother Cain. But Jesus, who has died at the hands of all sinners, has died for Abel and all of us that we may be forgiven and raised from the dead to live forever! The mentioning of Jesus as the mediator of a new covenant takes us to the offering of his body and the shedding of his blood, which we receive in the Sacrament of the Altar. In the shakes of sin and death and by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus we have an eternal rock in which we stand.

By faith, which receives the sacrifice of Jesus, we have come to the mountain of peace with all the company of heaven in festal gathering. Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, gives to us his very body and blood hidden in the bread and wine for the forgiveness, life, and salvation. And so, our Lord and Savior has left us a foretaste of that which is to come in the day when all veils are removed and we are in the full glorious presence of the beauty of Jesus! In him we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and new heaven and new earth - the home of righteousness. The writer of our epistle lesson reminds us:

... he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore

let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

All that can be shaken will be removed and the Lord promises to create a new heaven and new earth, where we dwell with Jesus. We will enter the forever new moon. We will reach the destination of the Sabbath - the day of rest - which God had planned for us from the beginning. Our labor will give way to our forever rest in a combination of that which is heavenly and earthly, where there is peace and the absence of all evil. This new creation is already ours in being born again in Baptism. We taste it already by faith in the sacrament of the altar where there is the festal gathering around Jesus and all that he gives. Acceptable worship is to receive and give thanks for **A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken!**

One Lutheran Commentator writes: “Since his kingdom is secure, they stand on solid ground as righteous citizens; his grace provides them with stability ... that in turn produces reverence and awe, grateful respect for his generosity and utter amazement at his goodness.” One day God will gather us from this place. And there we will see the Lord and his paradise. In the meantime, by faith we rest on his unchanging grace. As our sermon hymn said: “When every earthly prop gives way, / He then is all my hope and stay.” Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that can never be shaken - one built on Christ the solid Rock by which we stand!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott