

Text: Hebrews 12:4-24

Focus: Live in the Family of God

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation this morning is the Epistle lesson of Hebrews chapter twelve verses four through twenty-four.

Boys and Girls, I pray that you are doing well today. Have you ever pondered why your family is the way that it is? Do you always get along with your cousins? Do you always like your aunts and uncles? Do you always love your moms and dads and do what they say? No! Really? We may not always like our family members, but no matter what they are our family. Brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins. Today, we will talk about a vast extended family that all of us have. Our family here at church, the family of God. What does that family look like? How does it act? Ponder those questions as you hear the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

### **Life in the family of God**

What makes us a part of the family of God? Normal families are blood relations to each other. Just look at any genealogy or ancestry listing, so and so begat so and so who begat so and so, all on down to the present generation. As Christians, we too are united, not by our own blood, but by the

blood of Christ Jesus, shed for us upon the cross of Calvary. Through the waters of Holy Baptism, we are united to Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' cleanses us from every single one of our sins and unites us together into His holy family, a family joined by His blood.

### **Not easy, Afflictions as discipline**

Being a member of this family is not an easy thing to be. Belonging to Jesus means that the world hates and despises us because of Christ. It will do anything that it can to make us abandon the faith. Satan and all of his host are arrayed against us, tempting us into sin time and time again. They do this to force us to abandon the faith, give up, and lose all hope. Our enemies will do anything. They will hurt our bodies, kill us, and take our possessions. They may even berate us, insult us, call us horrible names and do unspeakable things to us. How should we react to all of these things?

We could very easily bemoan our fate and be in terror of all of the enemies and hatred arrayed against us. We could just give up and join them in order to avoid all of the afflictions. In reality, we can, and should, hold up our heads high. We view our afflictions not as terror but as discipline used on a child by a loving father. Just as an earthly father uses afflictions in order to discipline a son whom he loves, so too does our Heavenly Father use the afflictions we go through in order to chastise us as His children.

Undergoing the chastisements, afflictions, crosses, and losses are indeed painful. Yet, they have the purpose of training

for living righteously, of awakening us again and again to our need for God, of strengthening our desire to be free from sin, of making those who have suffered actually able to say, as one child of God did: “I am glad to say that this disease has brought me back to my Savior, and I trust in the future to be a better Christian than I have ever been heretofore.”

### **One of peace together, mutual concern**

That is one of the reasons that we gather together in worship, united together as a family. That when we do go through hard times, we can strengthen each other to hold fast to the faith we have been given. Here, we share our mutual concerns, mourn together, weep together, and rejoice together. We remind each other about the great love that God has shown to us in Christ Jesus, that we are indeed children of a loving Father. That our suffering is a token of God’s love for us, a treatment which He accords only to such as He receives into His heart and cherishes with all the wonderful love of His fatherly mercy

We encourage each other by strengthening our weak hands and knees to live as the people of God. It is proper and fitting for the children of God to care for each other’s physical and spiritual welfare. Each then truly wants the others to be among those who will see the Lord and who are going through the sanctifying restoration which he gives to the justified. As people of God, we strive to live in peace together with one another showing the unity of our faith, united by our Lord, our history, and our common confessions. We encourage one another to not be like Esau who gave up eternal blessing for a mere temporal

morsal, selling his right as the firstborn for a bowl of stew. Those who are stronger come alongside and strengthen those who are weak. If the stronger believers are always firm and steadfast in all matters pertaining to sanctification and to discipleship of Christ, then their example will serve as an aid to the weaker brethren, causing them to follow the Master without doubt and without flinching until they reach the goal above. We do this by caring for one another, when someone is physically unwell, we help drive them to the doctor's, bring them food, pray for the Lord's healing to come, and much more. When someone is spiritually unwell, we encourage them to be where the Lord has promised to be, to receive His Word and Sacraments, to read their Bibles, join in bible study, and encourage them to strengthen their faith.

### **Encouraged by the past to focus on greater things to come (Sinai vs Heavenly Jerusalem)**

We do all of this, encouraged by what awaits us in and through Christ Jesus. The author ends our text today with a focus comparing Mount Sinai with the heavenly Jerusalem to come. Unlike at Sinai, where the people saw the fire and the quakes, where they came to darkness and gloom and to the sound of a trumpet and to a voice sounding in words, which they that heard earnestly begged that further speech might not be added to them. and shook in terror, unable to stand the words of the Law. Fortunate we are that we are no long under the Law, the very giving of which struck abject terror into the hearts of a whole nation. But we draw near to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the myriad upon myriads of angels. We join

with them gather around the great festal feast because of the sacrifice of our Lord Whose blood cries out, not for vengeance and punishment, but for mercy and grace. A grace given by God that we may see Him face to face in joy as our Heavenly Father, united as His dear beloved Firstborns.

May the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.