

Sermon Title: Shaken (Yet once more)
 Primary Text(s): Hebrews 12:18-29
 Other Text(s): Psalm 71:1-6
 By: Rev. Terry Carty
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 Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church
 Season: Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Main Point: What does the future hold for us? God is unshakable, so if we cling to those things that are of God (love God, love others) we will not be shaken away.

Psalm 71:1-6

71:1 In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.

71:2 In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.

71:3 Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

71:4 Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

71:5 For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O LORD, from my youth.

71:6 Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

We don't really know who was the writer of the Letter to Hebrews. Most current scholarship thinks this is Apollos rather than Paul. This is a letter to a church that is in its second generation of Christians and clearly in trouble of surviving both physically and spiritually.

This passage is apocalyptic, which means it refers to the end of the world as we know it. It begins by reminding the readers about the fearsome way the Israelites had encountered God in the wilderness and the terrifying experience of Moses when he received the tablets of law from God.

Then it moves to the heavenly kingdom of God that Jesus had promised.

Hebrews 12:18-29

12:18 You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest,

12:19 and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.

12:20 (For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.")

12:21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear.")

12:22 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,

12:23 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,

12:24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

12:25 See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth (*i.e. God speaking to Moses and being interpreted to the people*), how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! (*i.e. Jesus speaking the direct word of God, not an interpretaton.*)

12:26 At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven."

12:27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of what is shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;

12:29 for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

Haiti is still an image of being shaken. On January 12, 2010 a magnitude 7.0 earthquake occurred followed for 2 weeks by at least 52 aftershocks measuring 4.5 or greater. 230,000 people died and one million were left homeless.

When I began to study this week's scripture passages, I remembered the title of one of my sermons from the past. It was a play on the way James Bond preferred his vodka martini: "Shaken, not Stirred." I had turned it around to form the sermon title "Stirred, not Shaken."

When I looked it up, it was a sermon that I preached right here nine years ago. At that time Haiti was still reeling from the earthquakes that had devastated that island nation starting from January that year.

My point that day was "God wants us to have a tenacious faith that is unshakable. We can find such a faith by being devoted disciples to the life of Jesus."

For the past 6 weeks I have been laying out for you the characteristics of a disciple of Jesus according to John Wesley. Wesley spent the first third of his life seeking to know salvation. He spent the rest of his life seeking to help others be faithful disciples who were unshakable.

Think about it. He said that his band of Methodists were not odd, nor did they set themselves apart from other Christians by unusual clothing nor unusual habits nor odd opinions about scriptures. They were regular Christians who had chosen to read the Word of God and to join with others in covenant to try to support each other in living the life Jesus spoke of.

What he called "marks" of a Methodist came from living the Great Commission: "Love God, love others."

A disciple (Methodist) loves God so much that one opens their heart to God's love. Loving God, according to Wesley, means allowing Gods love to flow into our heart until it fills us with love to overflowing.

Having been filled with God's love to overflowing, the 2nd mark then is joy and happiness. Not just moments of happiness when we feel delight, but a life filled with happiness even in spite of adversity.

Also, having been filled with God's love, the 3rd mark is thankfulness in all circumstances. This is a thankfulness for the good things that happen to us, but it is also a thankfulness in our times of need ... a thankfulness that God is present in all situations to love us, support us, and lead us beyond.

Still being filled with God's love, the 4th mark is a disciple (Methodist) prays constantly. We are aware of God's presence and constantly in touch with the Holy Spirit that gives us solice, hope, and direction in our lives on a minute by minute basis.

And the 5th mark is that a disciple (Methodist) loves others. This is closes the loop of love. Being filled to overflowing with God's love, we love others in ways that even we ourselves sometimes find surprising.

As you can imagine, joy, happiness, thankfulness and prayer at all times and in all things make us unshakable.

 And we are going to need to be unshakable. The writer of Hebrews quotes ancient prophets of God: "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This image of shaking indicates that God is cleansing the earth and heaven. Things that are false gods will be shaken off. Things that are evil, not of God, will be shaken off. Shaking is an image used to indicate getting rid of anything that is not fit for God's kingdom.

I think that we are seeing a lot of shaking in our world right now. Terrorism and violence abound. Drugs are the ruination of the lives of generations of families. People can't seem to agree to disagree any more ... everything is a competition to be won. Politics in government, communities and even in churches are so divisive that we are not really sure which side to be on ... but we assume that we must be on one side or the other.

I think our congregation is going to be shaken. We already have so many on our minds and in our prayers who are in dire circumstances. Our church remains in a precarious financial situation. Some changes voted by the Tennessee Annual Conference are likely to shake our viability even more strongly. Public debate and voting in the United Methodist denomination have shaken our credibility as a Christian Church.

 But we should not be shaken away. At the very foundation of this little church that we call our own, are the marks of a Methodist. They directly address the promise of Hebrews "what cannot be shaken may remain. Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe."

I want to finish this message today with the same words I finished that other sermon 9 years ago about being shaken: "So today, go from this place stirred by the music, stirred by the faith of each other, stirred by assurance from the Word of God. Go into a shaky world and live with the confidence that you are being made unshakable."

Eucharistic Preface

Let us lift up our hearts.

.....***We lift them to the Lord.***

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

.....***It is right to give our thanks and praise.***

It is indeed right to give you our thanks and praise, O God,
for you are our rock and haven;
the tower of strength to whom we can always turn.

You created the heavens and earth,
and the sound of your voice shakes all things.
You put your words in the mouths of the prophets
to destroy wickedness and overthrow the ruthless,
and to build justice and plant righteousness.

Your child, Jesus Christ, came among us
with words of freedom, hope and healing
which so scandalised the powerful that they crucified him,
but you raised him to new life
and appointed him as the mediator of a new covenant.
Before we were formed in the womb, you knew us
and now you are bringing us into your holy city
with the angels and saints and the faithful of every age
to rejoice together at the wonderful things you are doing.

On the night Jesus gave himself up for us