

Sermon Note: Unshaken

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

There's a strange comfort in the phrase, "a whole lot of shaking going on." Whether it's upheaval in our lives, anxiety in the news, or pressure under the surface—we know what it feels like when the ground seems unstable. We long for something solid.

In this week's message, we continue our **Dearly Beloved** series by turning to a passage that contrasts the fearful and untouchable with the present and unshakable. Hebrews offers a vision of worship that isn't meant to unsettle us, but to steady us—anchoring our lives in something that lasts. The question is not whether there will be shaking, but what will remain.

Illustration Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3J1AO9z0tA>

In this scene from *Apollo 13* (1995), what begins as a routine transmission turns into a crisis. As alarms sound and systems fail, the astronauts and mission control face a moment where everything starts to shake—literally and figuratively.

Why This Video?

This scene is a powerful picture of what it feels like when everything starts to shake. One moment the astronauts on Apollo 13 are going through routine procedures; the next, alarms are sounding, power is failing, and nothing makes sense. Confusion spreads quickly, both onboard and on the ground.

But in the midst of the chaos, a quiet voice of wisdom speaks. You can hear it when flight director Gene Kranz (played by Ed Harris) centers the room. His calm isn't just personal—it reshapes the space around him. He doesn't solve the problem immediately, but he does something just as important: he helps the team stay grounded so they can begin to respond. In moments of crisis, it's often not answers that save us first—it's presence, clarity, and the discipline to act together with purpose.

Video Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to the shift from routine to crisis in this scene?
2. How did the characters respond differently to the confusion and alarms?
3. What do you notice about Gene Kranz's role in the flight control room?
4. In what ways does calm leadership make a difference under pressure?
5. Have you ever experienced a moment when someone else's steady presence helped you stay grounded?
6. What do you think helps people stay focused when everything feels like it's coming apart?
7. Where do you see teamwork or trust showing up in this scene?

8. When have you had to respond to a situation before fully understanding it? What helped you move forward?
9. What does this scene suggest about the importance of presence and clarity in uncertain moments?

Hebrews 12:18-29 (CEB)

¹⁸You haven't drawn near to something that can be touched: a burning fire, darkness, shadow, a whirlwind, ¹⁹a blast of a trumpet, and a sound of words that made the ones who heard it beg that there wouldn't be one more word. ²⁰They couldn't stand the command, If even a wild animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned.

²¹The sight was so frightening that Moses said, "I'm terrified and shaking!"

²²But you have drawn near to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, to countless angels in a festival gathering, ²³to the assembly of God's firstborn children who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous who have been made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better than Abel's blood.

²⁵See to it that you don't resist the one who is speaking. If the people didn't escape when they refused to listen to the one who warned them on earth, how will we escape if we reject the one who is warning from heaven? ²⁶His voice shook the earth then, but now he has made a promise: Still once more I will shake not only the earth but heaven also. ²⁷The words "still once more" reveal the removal of what is shaken—the things that are part of this creation—so that what isn't shaken will remain. ²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that can't be shaken, let's continue to express our gratitude. With this gratitude, let's serve in a way that is pleasing to God with respect and awe, ²⁹because our God really is a consuming fire.

Scripture Study Questions

1. According to verses 18–21, how did the people feel at Mount Sinai? Why do you think even Moses was afraid?
2. Why does the writer contrast Mount Sinai with Mount Zion? What do these two places suggest about how God relates to people then—and now?
3. What does the passage say Jesus has done for us? How are we called to respond?
4. Some believe that faith should protect us from hardship—but this passage offers something different. What does it mean to you that God promises presence and access, even during the shaking?
5. Does this promise change the way you understand hardship or struggle? If so, how? If not, explain.
6. What are some things in our world—or in your life—that need to be "shaken out" to make room for something more lasting?

Additional (Optional) Questions

1. What things can we experience and learn about best by physically touching them?
2. Consider your other senses (smell, hearing, taste, and sight). What are some things we experience that cannot be touched?
3. Which senses are most associated with your strongest memories?

4. Have you ever considered hearing as being able to touch you from a distance? (a person’s voice or recording pushes air molecules until they physically touch the eardrum and bones in your ear, which vibrate)
5. Now, think about your mind. What can you imagine or feel that cannot be touched, smelled, heard, tasted, or seen?

We often talk about five senses—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—but the human body is capable of perceiving far more. Try this: close your eyes and touch your finger to the tip of your nose. That’s proprioception, your sense of where your body is in space. Pinch your arm—that’s nociception, your awareness of pain. Stand on one foot and try to balance. That’s your vestibular sense at work. Blow warm air on your hand, then purse your lips and blow again to feel the difference—that’s thermoception, your ability to sense temperature. And if you pause and notice your hunger, heartbeat, or breathing, you’re tapping into interoception—your sense of your internal state. Even your sense of time passing—like silently counting to ten—is called chronoception.

Scientists now believe we may have twenty or more distinct senses. Some people even experience synesthesia, where numbers, letters, or sounds are linked involuntarily to specific colors. Others claim to have a “sixth sense,” though there’s no scientific evidence for ESP. Still, all of this reminds us that there is more to how we perceive the world—and how we encounter the divine—than what we can see or touch.

6. What might it mean to approach God not just with the senses we know, but with the ones we’re still learning to trust?
7. What are some ways we experience and foster a relationship with God?
8. Do we experience God only through our senses, or is it something more? What do you think that something more is “that makes approaching God a wholly different experience?”

Weekly Action

Choose one small spiritual practice to return to each day this week—something that helps you stay grounded in God’s presence. It could be lighting a candle, breathing deeply, praying a short phrase, or reading a favorite psalm. Then, at the end of the week, write a sentence that begins: “Even if everything shakes, I will hold on to...” Let this be your quiet act of worship: a way to name what lasts, even when everything else is in motion.

Prayer

Loving God, we give thanks that we do not stand alone or in fear but in your holy presence, surrounded by your grace. Help us live each day with reverence and joy as your beloved children.