

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

[1] Just last weekend, I was in Reno visiting my brother's family.

They live at the 4,000 foot elevation overlooking Reno.

[2] In his backyard is Mount Rose.

In the four days we were there, we went to and over Mount Rose several times.

[3] At about 9,000 feet, there is clearing and meadow and a gentle sloping hill.

Every time we went through there, hordes of people were scurrying about.

[4] Snow shoeing across the meadow.

Cross country skiing through the woods.

AND

Sledding on the hill.

[5] Remember the childhood game king of the hill?

You know the game played on the playground
when there was a mountain of heaped snow.

[6] In the game, you would charge up the snow pile,
pushing and shoving each other down the slippery slope,
scrambling to get to the top.

[7] That is what all the sledders reminded me of.

Kids scrambling to get to the top of the hill, to be King of the hill!

Life in this world is a lot like playing king of the hill—

people scrambling for advantages,

competing with each other, and

pushing others down

to enhance themselves, their own image, their own position.

[8] Psalm 113 reminds us of the greatness of God.

His glory is above the heavens.

He is exalted over all the nations from the rising of the sun until its setting.

He is enthroned on high.

Yet this God, who is over all things and who made all things,

stoops down to raise us up,
to bring hope to the poor and needy who live on the earth.

God is not like the vain rulers of this world,
who are puffed up in their pride and selfishness.

God does not play king of the hill.
Although he is indeed great and exalted over everything,
he cares for the most miserable creature;
he stoops down to look at ... the beggar on the garbage pile,
the criminal in the prison cell, and
the unborn child in the womb.

Indeed, Jesus tells us that he even numbers the hairs on our head.
He knows and cares about us to the last detail.

[*Suffering*]

[9] Nevertheless,

There's such terrible human suffering and poverty in this world!
We ask ourselves, "Why?"

Terrible distress and deficiency is indeed pervasive in our world.

Yes, that is a reality in third world where some are
literally living on the ash heap or garbage dump.

Yet sorrow and suffering
are all around us.

Yes, even in your own backyard.

As a result – Humans struggle to explain suffering and why God allows it.

You know, the psalmists were often asked...

They were asked by the unbelieving world
in the face of misfortune and calamity,

[10] "Where is your God?"

Where is God in a world where millions die of hunger and disease?

Where is God when we ourselves face tragedy?

Where is God in death – when we recognize that life is but a breath?

Scripture gives a clear answer to the question of God and human suffering.

Some want to blame God. Even ask, “Why has he gone away from me?”

BUT

It wasn't that God abandoned us.

It was us!

We human beings, like rebellious offspring, have turned away from him.

We have abandoned God!

You see...

[11] God created us in love for a life of fellowship with him.

But the serpent, the devil, tempted Eve as he tempts us,

saying, “Did God really say . . . ?”

He causes us to doubt.

Then Like Eve, we wanted to be free from God; we wanted to be like God and live without him. This is the source of misery and suffering in the world.

Rather than remaining aloof from human suffering,

[12] God comes to us in love.

That is the good news of our text....

Our God is not like we are in our games of king of the hill.

Although he is beyond all our puny efforts to comprehend him,

Although in his holiness we cannot approach him,

yet he “looks far down on the heavens and the earth” (v 6).

[13] God the Son lowered himself in the incarnation. THAT'S CHRISTMAS!

God the Son left his throne on high and entered the filth and sin of this world.

He was born in a stable and lived with the poor.

Jesus humbled himself to help the poor and needy.

He touched the lepers and wept with the grieving.

Think of the words by which Jesus tenderly invites us to himself:

[14] ***“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:29).***

Isn't it amazing that Jesus, the Lord of the universe, should say,

“I am lowly in heart”?

THAT'S EPIPHANY! This man Jesus, must be God.

I had an epiphany – that man is God!

[15] FOR Jesus –

He is no King of the hill, lording it over us.

No, he stoops down under us and takes up our load of sin.

He goes down to the ash heap, the dung pile,

in order to lift us up from the darkness of sin and death.

Jesus –

He took our load of sin upon himself on the cross

in order that he might raise us up.

In his resurrection, we, too, are raised.

By faith in him, we are exalted,

and we sit with the Prince of the universe,

high above the power of death and the devil (Eph 2:6).

But that is not it!

Jesus continues his mission of love for people suffering here on earth

through those who are themselves here on earth

That is — his Church.

a. Jesus continues his incarnational work through the Church (Jn 20:21).

b. Our faith in Jesus' incarnation leads us to care for human need.

[16] There are some in history and I am afraid the number is growing today,
where people deny the incarnation.

The First Letter of John was written against this heresy.

They are called Docetists – and Docetists make Jesus blurry!

The Docetists believed that since God was so lofty and majestic,

it was inconceivable that God could truly become man.

They also despised the human body

and said the only thing that really mattered was the spirit.

As a consequence,

they not only denied the incarnation, the true humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ,

but they also neglected to care for the bodily needs of their neighbor.

In contrast...

Because we believe the Word became flesh,

we will care for the physical needs of others (1 Jn 3:17–18).

We had an epiphany – Jesus is not only man but God!

As the lord Jesus humbled himself to raise us up,
may we also extend ourselves, in his name, to the poor and suffering.

[Conclusion]

[17] Our Lord did not play power games when he lived in this world.

He is no king of the hill

He came down from the mountain to the lives of
the lost, the poor, the needy, the weak, and the defenseless.
He loved and sacrificed his all to raise us up.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we also give of ourselves to raise up others.

For you and I...

We do not believe in a distant and uncaring God,
so we follow in Jesus' steps,
not being aloof from the sufferings of this life,
but going to people in their suffering
in order to lift them up in Jesus' name.

This is the mission we are on in this life.
So from the rising of the sun to its setting,
the name of the Lord is to be praised! Amen.

So we... Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among the people. AMEN! (Psalm 96:3)
