

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity
10/06/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Genesis 28:10-17
David McMinn

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Old Testament book of Genesis the 28th chapter.

Jacob was still single. His father, Isaac, told him not to take for a wife any of the women from the Canaanites. The Canaanites were not believers in the one true God. According to instructions from his father Jacob was to travel a good distance to get to his mother's relatives and take a wife from her kin. And that he does. But it's long journey through the wilderness and not an easy one either.

As Jacob travels he comes to a certain place Scripture tells us. *“Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac...”*

So as Jacob journeyed he came to a certain place and he stopped there and he took some rock and made a place to lay his head. Then he went to sleep and dreamed about a ladder that reached from where he was and into heaven and from the top of the ladder on His throne in heaven God speaks to Jacob.

I've seen shows where they've searched for the Holy Grail, the cup Jesus used for the Last Supper. Many hours have been lost in the search for the Ark of the Covenant. Noah's Ark has been sought for ages. At different times people have been fascinated with the idea of finding the original location of the Garden of Eden.

In all these things people have looked for power and insight into God. By finding these various treasures they might get closer to God or find out more about Him. In these things they might find the secrets of life or harness the power of God for use in their lives. But based on what Jacob experiences at this certain place maybe that would be the spot to find. Maybe this would be the place to go and the way to harness the power of God and find out more about Him.

Jacob ended up naming this place Bethel. Bethel means the house of God. For many centuries Bethel would be an important city to Israel. We know where the place, the city of Bethel, is geographically. But what would be interesting would be the site of the vision itself. Where did Jacob actually lay his head and dream this dream and see the ladder to heaven? Where is his stone pillow?

But is that the thrust of what Moses records for us here in Genesis? Is it this locale that is important? Well it's not unimportant, at least to Jacob. He erects a monument here. He names the place and reverences it by calling it Bethel. But would it be important to get back to that geographical location?

Should we strive to find Bethel, or Eden, or the Ark or is it important to reclaim the temple in Jerusalem?

While all those places and things were and are important for the people of God they're not sources of God's power. They're not places to go to get in touch with God. You cannot journey anywhere on the face of the earth to strengthen your faith. Now to be sure it'd be nice to go to the Holy Land, as it's called, and see where Jesus walked and talked and lived, died and rose; to see where Jacob laid his head that night and to breathe air from those ancient sites or even to dip your toes in the Jordan where our Lord was baptized. That'd be nice.

But after you've done all that and today spent all that money it would take you'd be no closer to God than if you'd have stayed right here and saved your money. There might be benefit in going to further your knowledge of God and those places, but none of those things can make you any closer to God nor can they make you more saved.

See the important thing for Jacob and the thing that stuck with him wasn't the vision, although it was certainly important. It wasn't the place. No the important thing was not what he saw but what He heard. Listen again to the Word of God: *"I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac...Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."* And what was it that God promised? *"The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north*

and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Jacob was hearing with his own ears the promise God made to his grandfather Abraham. He was hearing what God promised to his father Isaac. Into his own ears Jacob was hearing that his offspring would be a blessing to all the families of the earth. The important thing Jacob receives at Bethel is the promise of the Messiah.

Now you've got to remember who Jacob was. He was this sharp and duplicitous dealer. He was the one who stole his brother's birthright and tricked his father into giving him his brother's blessing as well. He's the one who didn't want his brother born before him and so held on to his brother's heel as he was born. He was the one who conspired with his mother to deprive his brother of what was rightfully his. Jacob was a sinful man.

And yet Jacob was an heir to the promise of God. Through Him God would bring the Savior into this world. That Savior, that singular Offspring, would save Jacob and the rest of God's people all the way down the line to you...and even beyond.

It wasn't the spot that was important. It wasn't even the vision. It was the Word of God that was spoken that made the place, vision and time important. The Word was so important that Jacob anoints the place with oil and gives it a name, Bethel, the House of God.

It's amazing how God works with His people. And it's amazing what kind of people God works with. Look at us here. Now I have to say that you're a

great congregation. I hear about other places and people and I thank God you are who you are. I thank God that I'm your pastor. You're a faithful little group who through the power of the Holy Spirit have kept the Word of God in this place. All of that is true.

But we must confess, me with you, that we have not deserved what we have here. You and I are sinners of the worst kind. If we're serious concerning the commandments of God we must confess that we're at least as great a sinner as Jacob was. We too have wanted our own way in this life and we too have used many evil means at our disposal to get it.

And yet we gather here, in this place today and what do we get? Well we get exactly what Jacob got. God comes to us and promises that He will always be with us: "*Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.*" Except instead of the promises of an Offspring who would bless the world we receive the Offspring who has already come into the world.

Here in the place, truly the House of God, we receive Jesus Christ. We receive Him not because there is anything special about us before the face of God but because on us God poured out His mercy in Christ. Jesus was the promise to Jacob and Jesus is the promise to us. Jacob received the Word of God that day and he was strengthened to go through the rest of His journey on earth. You here today receive that very same Word. It's the Word that creates and sustains. It's the Word that forgives and uplifts. It's that Word that will bear you over to life eternal. Here in this place you receive Jesus Christ and His

salvation. Because of Him you stand justified before God having been forgiven of all your sins. Here in this Bethel, this House of God, you're made a child of the Promise of God.

And if that weren't enough to make this house as special as the first Bethel, God will do something here today that Jacob could only dream of: Jesus Christ will give you Himself through the bread and wine; that is His true body and blood. Jesus sets the table as the Founder of the feast and He provides Himself as the true meal. It's the meal of immortality as Luther called it. This is the place where the immortal God touches and feeds mortal and sinful man giving him an inheritance of eternal life without sin.

Here God gives YOU a place to lay your head and rest. Here God refreshes you for the journey that is the rest of your life. Here God strengthens and feeds you to get you to your final destination, eternal life with Him. Surely this place is Bethel, the gate to Heaven. Surely this is the House of God. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.