

Sermon: Pentecost 7

The Rev. Mike Wernick

July 23, 2017

Year A

Genesis 28:10-19a

Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23

Romans 8:12-25

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

The story of our faith... is the story of a God of place... not a God against place... and while here... [point to head]... we know that God is everywhere... while here [head]... we know that there is no PLACE we can go... no set of geographic coordinates... where God is not... we still feel God's presence more clearly at some times... than at others... and we feel God's presence more keenly in some places... than in others...

And there are religious places... to which people make pilgrimages... the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem... along the *Camino de Santiago* ... the Way of St. James... which begins in France and ends in Spain... to the Sacred Mosque in Mecca... but there are also some places to which people make pilgrimage... which are not holy places... *per se*... but the fact that hundreds of thousands of people have been there... imbues the place with a sense of sacredness... places which... in some ways... have been set apart... the Lincoln Memorial... Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater... the Grand Canyon... the Twin Towers Memorial... the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma... the Holocaust Museum in Washington... these places may not have been holy to begin with... but perhaps because of the remarkable creativity which went into them... because of what may have happened there... because of what they have come to represent... places which weren't holy to begin with... have taken on that quality... perhaps it's because of the residual consciousness of countless visitors... and the emotions which have welled up in their hearts... and what they have thought there... and how their spirits grew... that the places became holy...

The summer after I graduated from high school... I spent two months in Israel... when we spent time in Jerusalem... there was holiness there... when we spent the day in

Bethlehem... there was holiness there... we were in Beersheba... on an archaeological dig... in the desert for three weeks... we dug from 5:30 in the morning until 11:00... because by then it was already 105°... and we were done for the day... but at the top of the dig site... at the top of the Tel... the hot... dry... desert wind blew dust all around... and it also blew around a kind of collective *anamnesis* from the past... my experience was that the weight of history there... the stories carried in the air there... were so thick... that it seemed you cut them with a knife...

I didn't go towards Haran the way Jacob did... we did walk a short distance across the desert to the town of Omer... where there was a swimming pool... but on his way... Jacob stopped... and slept... and as he slept... he perceived something deeper... something holy... in that thin place... he experienced a ladder... which connected where he was... to God's transcendent place... while God's messengers... went up and down... up and down... between the two places... and because Jacob likely held the common belief... that gods lived in stones... and there *are* other references to this in scripture... and because his dream came while his head was on a rock... he erected the rock as a pillar... an object of worship... like a totem... and anointed the rock with oil... though in four chapters... his encounter with God will involve wrestling... and a dislocated hip... and a new name...

But maybe even in today's reading... when Jacob woke up... he may have felt as though God's presence was so pronounced... that he could cut the air with a knife... and he named the place *Bethel*... the House of *El*... the House of God... which is a numinous place... perhaps a kind of portal... to spiritual insight... to the messages brought back and forth... by God's angels...

Deborah Block reminds us... that one of the names for God... is *Rock of Israel*... *T'zur Yisrael*... and a Torah commentary reveals... that another name for God... is *the place*... according to this commentary... God's name is also... *the place*... so Jacob... coming... *in v. 11*... upon a certain place... could be read as... Jacob came upon God...

and since God encompasses the whole world... the rabbis say... every place... is God's place... every place... is God's field...

The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field... not just any seed... but good seed... and the good seed... are the children of the Kingdom... but the weeds have been sown by the forces of division and accusation... by the Diablos and the Satan... forces in which we sometimes... unwittingly... unwillingly participate... forces which pit the systems of this world... against God's intent... forces which can lull us into dualistic thinking... instead of unitive experience...

Last week I suggested that God was the sower... who *parabled* seed all over the place... and I suggested that instead of focusing on which kind of soil we are... that we focus on God's egregious generosity... and today I propose... that when the enemy came to plant the weeds of division and accusation... everyone was asleep... but I don't mean tucked into bed at night... I mean when their eyes were open but they weren't awake... I mean the way Jesus talked about letting the dead bury their dead... I mean that the light of Christ did not yet shine fully in their hearts and minds... and its the weeds of being in a corporate trance... that keep God's field from producing an abundant harvest... *but leave the weeds alone... the sower says... we'll take care of them at the harvest... and burn away all that which divides and accuses... so we're left with the kind of harvest I want...*

Jacob named the place of his encounter... *Beth-El*... and I believe that for those of us who read the Gospel... the place of the harvest... the location... the transcendent latitude and longitude... of God's house... is the human heart... that's really God's house... that's really the place where Jacob met God... the human heart...

So as we become increasingly aware... that there are four kinds of soil inside each of us... I pray we also realize that planted in those soils... are both wheat and weeds... and its crucial to know which is which... because knowing this... makes it more difficult

for us to point fingers... and knowing this may help us consider how to best respond... when someone we've labeled a weed... acts like wheat... and vice-versa...and knowing that Jacob met God in his heart... may help us be more open to God's messengers... who travel continually back and forth... between God's heart... and our hearts... after all... we're all in this field together...

Mike+