

“Surely God Is in this Place” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent Midweek 2 December 7, 2022

- I. **Genesis 28 and John 1** – previously read
- II. **Our home church often has a special place in our hearts.**
 - a. There is just something about this place that gives us a sense of peace and quiet – as one visitor put it awhile back, “it feels like a warm hug.”
 - b. We get to listen to Jesus... be refreshed by the Word and God’s gift of communion, and even connect with others on the same path with Christ.
 - c. Yet, we also have to leave here at some point, heading back into the struggle called life in the world.
 - i. The late Pastor August Mennicke, wrote a devotion called “Has God Forgotten?”
 - ii. He says, “Our daughter shared a conversation she overheard at home. Our 3-year-old grandson was standing at the basement stairs, trying to muster enough courage to make the descent. Before taking the first step, he said, ‘Oh Jesus, it’s awful dark down there. You’d better hold my hand.’”¹
 - d. Can you relate?
 - i. We might get a short reprieve in this place, even a taste of heaven... but we always have to head back into the worries and troubles of the world.
 - ii. Does Jesus make any advents to you during your ordinary, everyday life?
- III. **Today we read and consider the story of “Jacob’s Ladder.”**
 - a. Jacob means “supplanter,” or someone who takes something that is not rightfully his.
 - i. That was Jacob alright... as he tricked his dad, Isaac into giving him the blessing that belonged to his older brother Esau.
 - ii. You can imagine how angry Esau was...
 - b. So Isaac and Rebekah decided Jacob better go work for uncle Laban, Rebekah’s brother.
 - c. Kind of like going off to join the military when you turn 18... the first time away from home... and not only that, but your brother is seething mad at you... and your not even sure he won’t try to find you and kill you...
 - i. And of course, you’re worried as you walk for miles and miles... out in the wilderness alone... talk about the real world... maybe that’s what people mean when they say, “That’s when things got real!”
 - ii. Anyway, Jacob was probably not expecting an advent in his problems, but he got one.
 - d. Genesis 28 says that as he dreamed, a ladder went from heaven all the way to the earth.

- i. God promised Jacob – just like He promised Isaac – just like He promised Abraham – that a great nation would come from his family, and the Promised Land would be their home..
- ii. Then Jacob woke up and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I didn’t know it.” And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

IV. **The significance of Jacob’s ladder is not always clear to us.**

- a. However, Jesus helps us to understand it better when He begins His ministry around a thousand years *after* Jacob lived.
- b. A ways north of Jacob’s dream, Jesus comes to Philip, who tells Nathanael - “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth ...”
 - i. Nathanael then says the famous line, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”
 - ii. Then Jesus meets Nathanael face to face, and convinced him that He truly was the Messiah by His vision of him under the fig tree...
 - iii. Before we got together now, I saw you... and Nathanael says, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel!”
 - iv. And now listen to this, listen with Jacob’s Ladder in mind....
 - 1. Jesus says, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these. And He said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (Jn 1:51).

V. **What is Jacob’s Ladder?**

- a. It’s Jesus.
- b. You see, the ladder Jacob saw with angels ascending and descending, with God at the top and scared little Jacob at the bottom is actually Jesus.
 - i. The title “Son of Man” comes from the Old Testament and points to the Messiah.
 - ii. Jesus applies this title to Himself... not only here but in other places in the Gospels.
- c. So now we can answer the question... Does the ladder go from earth to heaven or from heaven to earth? It’s both.
 - i. The Son of God comes from heaven to people like Jacob, people like you and me in our ordinary, everyday lives.
 - ii. He takes our sins to the cross, and then as our forerunner rises from the grave and then ascends... goes back up to the Father.
 - iii. Why? So that we can ascend to God... “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

- VI. **“Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.”**
- a. We are now in the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.
 - b. Jacob’s ladder isn’t just a story from long ago, but it’s ongoing!
 - c. Jesus continues to descend with God’s promises; and make no mistake, He descends to us in our real world lives.
 - d. How many times do we fear the journey ahead... or think we are all alone?
 - e. Jacob heard “I am with you and will keep you wherever you go” (Gn 28:15).
 - i. Today Jesus says to you, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).
 - f. Jacob heard, “In you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (28:14).
 - i. Jesus is that promised offspring of Jacob who calls us His own.
 - g. Jacob heard, “I am with you and will bring you back to this land” (28:15).
 - i. Today Jesus promises you “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pt 1:4).
 - h. So the Holy Spirit comes down, descends to us... and as He keeps our hearts and minds in Christ, we are thinking about the things that are above and our future glory.
 - i. Now, consider this from our current situation... What did Jacob have when he woke up from his dream?
 - i. In one sense, life was still the same... alone, running from danger... but he also had something that changed everything – the promises of God... and so do you.
 1. Saint Paul writes, “For all the promises of God find their yes in [Jesus],” (1 Corinthians 1:20).
 - j. Jesus is the ladder between you and heaven.
 - i. As the little boy going to the basement says, “Oh Jesus, you’d better hold my hand...” And He does.
 - ii. Advents abound!
- VII. **So, picture Jacob’s Ladder** as you go out into this week, with whatever challenges it might bring.
- a. “Oh Jesus, it’s awful dark down there. You’d better hold my hand.”
 - b. Take Advent out of church and into your ordinary, everyday world.
 - c. “O holy Child of Bethlehem, / Descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, / Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels / The great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, / Our Lord Immanuel.” Amen.

¹ Les Bayer, ed., *Devotions for the Chronologically Gifted* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 58.

² Sermon adapted from, “The Bible, Our Book of Advents”, Copyright © 2021, Concordia Seminary Press, St. Louis, MO, and Dr. Dale A. Meyer.