

“Where Have You Seen God, Lately?”
Genesis 28; Psalm 139

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Where have you seen God lately?

No, I’m not preaching an old sermon, though you’ve heard that question from me before and, perhaps, often. It seems to me, that question comes up often for disciples of Jesus Christ. In creation story we see that God created humankind in God’s own image. So, we are taught to consider the sacred aspect of all creation, and we dare say when we really look at our brother or sister we see *something of the face of God*.

And Jesus was a keen observer of the common features of life. He taught us through his parables to be always on the lookout for God and the things of God. We learn about God by considering the lilies of the field. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, a lost coin, a lost sheep. I am the good shepherd, Jesus said. I am the vine, I am the bread of life, I am the light of the world, I am the gate. No, Jesus isn’t actually a herder of sheep. Nor is he a vine, or a loaf of bread, or a light, or a gate. But he uses these images to help us “see” who Jesus is. Likewise, God isn’t a lily, and the kingdom of God isn’t a coin, but those images point beyond themselves to God. We protestants agree that Jesus is not bread and wine at communion, but Jesus is with us at the table when we eat bread and drink wine remembering Jesus. That holy remembering and that prayerful participation by the power of God’s Spirit is a true communion with Jesus. Sacrament, says Calvin, is a visible sign of God’s invisible grace. Jesus gave us solid, tangible things to remind us of and bind us to God.

Jesus tunes our vision and teaches us to be on the lookout for God and for the things of God.

So, where have you seen God, lately?

I see God and the things of God every time I look. Last Saturday we got word that a kindly professor at Union-PSCE, Lamar Williamson, died peacefully. He was surrounded by his family. They sang hymns in the languages he knew: English, French, and Tshiluba.

*Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty
early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.*

Where have you seen God, lately.

For me, small, tender things point like a flashing arrow to God. When a neighbor brings a neighbor food—that says “communion.” When somebody lets go of a grudge and stops hating themselves—that says “baptism.” Human laughter, human touch, a vulnerable smile—that speaks to God’s mercy. One word in Hebrew for “mercy” is ‘hessed,’ which means loving-kindness. When somebody says, “How can I help?” I hear God’s voice saying, “I am with you.”

Where have you seen God, lately?

Jacob was sleeping in Genesis chapter 28. He used a stone for pillow. He had a dream. He saw a great ladder descending from heaven to earth. Angels were going up and down. God spoke to Jacob. *I will give you the ground upon which you are lying. Your people will spread to the north and south, to the east and west. I’ll bless the whole world through your family.*

Jacob says, *Surely the Lord has been in this place, and I did not know it!*

Where have you seen God, lately?

Whether we see God face to face or not, whether we catch a glimpse of God or not, God sees us. That’s part of the good news this morning. Jacob discovers God in a dream, but God was there all along.

The Psalmist asks, where can I hide from your spirit? The answer is that I cannot hide. The darkest night is not dark to God, the farthest place is not far to God. I cannot hide from God even in the deepest part of my private self; God has searched me and known me.

We might lose God, but God does not lose us. That’s good news, isn’t it?

Maybe not. Maybe not all of the time. The Psalmist says that God sees my inmost thoughts. God is well acquainted with my ways. God discerns my thought even from far away. Maybe that’s not such good news. God knows our prejudice. God sees how fake our smile can sometimes be. God knows how we are underhanded behind our neighbor’s back. Do we want God to know this? We certainly can’t pretend to be noble when God sees the real us.

Maybe this is why Jacob was afraid after his dream. He felt dread (Wycliff) and terror (MSG). God is here, which is amazing, but who can stand in the presence of God? Jacob was afraid, but also filled with awe. He called that place the gate to heaven. He called it the house of God, Bethel.

Everyplace under the right circumstances becomes a gate to heaven. Every House is God's house because God is in it. Perhaps we should shape up, as some of my old teachers might say. God's here. Stand up straight. Mind your manners. Love your neighbor. Love expansively, as Lamar Williamston taught by word and deed. Be kind. Give thanks. Do good. Be humble. Praise God.

*Holy, holy, holy Lord God almighty
early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.*

Where have you seen God, lately?

AMEN.

Genesis 28:10-19a

¹⁰Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the 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. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and 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 all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that 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." ¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place — and I did not know it!" ¹⁷And 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."

¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ^{19a}He called that place Bethel;

Psalms 139:1-12, 23-24

¹ O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.

3 You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4 Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
5 You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

7 Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
11 If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
12 even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
24 See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.