

Sermon Text for April 10, 2016

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

John 10:7-10, Genesis 28:10-17

“I am the gate”

We are in an amazing time in the life of the church. On the heels of Easter where everyone is joyful and celebrating the fact that Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. On the heels of a youth Sunday where we had just about the same amount of people that than we did for Easter. We have broken the traditional trend where on the Sunday after Easter people stay home combined with those who stay home because it is youth Sunday. I am so proud of you in how you support the youth of this church.

We are also on the other side of the 90 Day Challenge. I need to tell you it was one of the most encouraging times in my ministry to hear people tell me that they were reading Scripture together with their spouses and it was the first time in their married years together that they were actually reading the Bible together and going over Scriptures together. In case you think I'm pointing you out, just know that there were more than a handful of you who told me that. For a pastor, that is encouraging.

It is especially encouraging when we find ourselves in this church as trying to carry out mission which is to make everyone mature in Christ through the presence of our Savior Jesus Christ. We believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father and this way, this gate needs to be revealed to people in a whole variety of ways whether it is through challenges, or The Well, or programs that reveal the presence of Jesus. We are in a good time in the life of the church, and Jesus as the gate is what it is all about. Over the last five months we are experiencing an increase of worship of over 30 people from last year. It is a good time in the life of the church.

But even in the midst of knowing that God is blessing us, we still have the need to reach out and strengthen those who need to see a visible sign of God being in control. I think of Dick and Nancy Cummings, John and Cheryl Faltin, Don and Pam Johnson. Even in the midst of all the blessings that we find in our lives there are still times when we just need a vision, a sign from God that hey, I am the gate, no one else, and so if I am the gate, then you will be okay. There is where Jacob finds himself today in our Scripture. In a dream he is reminded of God's presence firmly rooted here on earth. We see how his vision connects us to the risen and conquering Christ who transforms our fears into faith so that we may have abundant life.

He has just received God's blessing, he has just received another blessing from his father and his father tells him to go and marry someone from their family, not from the Cannanites, but Esau is still out there and he may be looking for him. He is all alone with a rock for his pillow. Let's go ahead and read what sign God gives to him.

Don't you love dreams? I love dreams. My kids ever since that local kid James Wolpert did well on the Voice have been following. There is one contestant who every time she is chosen by one of the 4 celebrity judges says: I had a dream that you were going to choose me. It has become a little silly, but dreams are fun, right? Unless they are nightmares. We have all heard about Jacob's ladder in Sunday School and in fact we

will sing about it right after the sermon. But what was the reason Jacob saw the ladder, why was the time just right for him to see it then? Did you know that Jacob's ladder was part of a dream that Jacob needed to hear at that time and at that place. Remember Jacob is a fugitive. He is fleeing from his big brother who has vowed to track him down and kill him. So Jacob is on the run frightened, scared, unsure of when he might be caught and taken down.

We live in an interesting time. In July I'm going to be officiating a wedding in Italy and for the first time in my life I'm wondering if it is safe enough to go and travel to it. I've never been the cautious type, but then again in my lifetime the State Department has never issued a travel warning for Europe either. The people of Europe are frightened and wondering when the next attack will come. Jacob was in the same state and he is exhausted. He must be exhausted because he arrives in a certain place, he doesn't even know where he is and uses a rock for a pillow. No wonder he has strange dreams, he is sleeping on a rock.

Here he is completely alone, vulnerable while he is sleeping on a rock no less when God comes to him and gives him both a vision and an auditory presence and he speaks to him. The text tells us a couple things about the ladder. First of all we see that the ladder is on the earth. Other translations read firmly planted on the earth in vs. 12. I love that part. God's presence firmly planted on earth. We see that definitely in Jesus, but we'll talk about that a little later. And angels, the messengers of God, the ones who bring good tidings to the future generations.

Remember in John 1:51 when Jesus tells his disciples who gather around him: "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon, not a ladder, but the Son of Man." Now just so we are on the same page, who is the Son of Man? Jesus. What are they ascending and descending upon in John? Jesus. So this must refer to this passage in Genesis 28 where Jacob sees the same thing except that they are going up and down on a ladder. Jesus must be equating himself to what? The ladder. Jesus calls himself that ladder which is firmly planted on the ground and who allows the communication between God and humanity to take place.

That is some serious theology there that we cannot overlook that is consistent in both passages and is backed up from other Scripture in both the Old and New Testament. Jesus Christ is the intermediary, the way and the means by which we can arrive to the Father. No one gets to the Father except by Him. But calling yourself a ladder is a little strange isn't it? Just as calling yourself a gate, that's a bit unusual too isn't it? We'll see this a little later as well.

Now Jacob did not know about Jesus, but he did know that right after this vision God tells him I am the Lord, he repeats the promise to him that he gave to his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. After he gives him this promise he tells him I am with you. Jacob, the fugitive, as he feels completely alone, out of touch with the rest of the world, fleeing for his life, seeking anywhere and everywhere for protection, encounters God and even the risen Christ right when he needed him the most. At that point God tells him I am with you, I will not leave you.

When was the last time you felt the presence of Christ, of Almighty God be se real to you that you could almost taste it and it even gave you goosebumps? A Jacob experience when you wake up and say, Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place, right here and now. How awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God. Beth-El and this is the gate of heaven, Jacob stated. Now we get to the gate

Jesus in his ministry never compares himself to a person. He never tells his disciples that he is like Moses, but rather tells them that he is the manna that Moses and the people of Israel gathered in the wilderness. He never calls himself Abraham at the well, but rather tells them that he is the water of life, the living water. He consistently uses objects to state who he is. This is unusual today and it was unusual in Jesus' time. In fact when he compared his flesh to bread in John he lost quite a few of his followers.

Jesus is the gate with all of the meaning that it carries. Jacob calls that place the gate of heaven. It was the place where he had directly felt God's presence and where he had been given a promise by God that his ancestors before him had heard and had followed. Jesus also states that I am the gate of heaven, whoever comes by me will be saved. Jacob was given abundant life because of his encounter with God, Jesus promises abundant life for all who enter by the gate by him. There is no other way. Jacob took part in that abundant life because of God's promise to him that he would be with him. God with us is Jesus Christ the ladder, the gate, the bread of life, the living water, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end.

I'm thinking this might be the right time to hear that Jesus is our ladder firmly planted on the earth who allows us to receive the promises of Almighty God who tells us that he is with us. Jesus is the gate and he is in control of all that place around us and to us. Do not fear, do not lose heart, do not despair for God comes and always delivers right on time. Amen.